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EVERYMAN, I will go with thee,

and be thy guide,

In thy most need to go by thy side

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Born in 1846 in Poland and educated at
Warsaw University. Awarded the Nobel Prize
for literature in 1905, Died in Switzerland
in 1916.

HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

Quo Vadis?

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INTRODUCTION BY
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INTRODUCTION

THE author of *Quo Vadis*?, Henryk Sienkiewicz, is the greatest of Poland's novelists: the only Polish novelist—we may say the only Polish writer—whose name has a universal renown. His place is with the world's finest writers of historical romance. Although one of his novels of contemporary manners, *Without Dogma*, and several of his short stories, notably *The Lighthouse-Keeper* and *Bartek the Conqueror*, stand in the first rank of their kind, it is upon his historical fiction that the fame of Sienkiewicz rests. His work began in the early seventies of the nineteenth century, and ended only with his death in 1916, two years before the liberation of his country for which he had unweariedly laboured. His zenith lasted for eighteen years. Those years saw the twenty volumes of his best historical novels, involving the closest research and executed with an artist's and scholar's care: it is said that he wrote one of the chapters of *Quo Vadis* ? thirty times before it met with his satisfaction. The Trilogy—*With Fire and Sword*, *The Deluge*, *Pan Wołodyjowski*—published between 1884 and 1887, at once raised Sienkiewicz to the position both of the supreme novelist of Poland and of a noble national leader.

The circumstances under which Sienkiewicz rose to fame explain the motive of his work. He was a great writer; he was no less an ardent patriot. When he first began his career with journalism and short tales the Polish nation lay under the shadow of the tragedy of 1863, ground down by an oppression which by the nature of things bore most hardly on the rising generation. The reaction against Polish romanticism had swung violently to the opposite scale, and the Positivist epoch—not very correctly so called—had set in. The idealism of the past which apparently had been powerless to save the nation yielded to the movement that had for its slogan Organic Work, Work from the Foundations; when all that was practical and concrete was the order of the day. Engineers and men of science became the heroes of fiction. The ideas which had actuated a former generation were at a discount. This tendency brought its

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own perils to a nation whose life, proscribed as it was by her Russian and Prussian oppressors, was necessarily abnormal. In the heroic traditions of Poland's history, as well as in the warnings conveyed by the errors and failures in the course of that history, Sienkiewicz saw the best means of preserving and strengthening Poland's threatened national life, of maintaining the continuity of Polish ideals, and thereby saving Poland's youth from the danger of denationalization and cosmopolitanism. Therefore he wrote his Trilogy as he himself says in its closing words: 'with no little toil for the strengthening of hearts.' He chose as its subject one of the most critical epochs of Polish history, the second half of the seventeenth century, when the Republic of Poland was assailed on all sides by foreign invasion and internal weakness, when it seemed as though her days were numbered: yet it ends with the triumph of Jan Sobieski. The patriotic significance of this work was easily to be discerned. Into this national expression, for such it was, and has been described by an eminent Polish scholar as a deed rather than a word, Sienkiewicz impressed all the powers of his splendid genius. With their gorgeous colour, their living reproduction of the past ages of history, their portraiture, tender, heroic, humorous, of the characters, whether historical or fictitious, who crowd their pages, and, above all, their passionate patriotism, these books exercised a fascination over the hearts of Sienkiewicz's compatriots such as no other work of fiction had ever done before in Polish history or is likely to do again. Every class of Polish man and woman read them and the name of their author became one of the most beloved in the nation.

His second great novel on Polish history, *The Knights of the Cross*, was published in 1900. Going further back to the medieval period it dealt with the theme, tragically actual to every Pole all through the history of Poland: the struggle of the Polish nation against German aggression. It is presented by Sienkiewicz in a masterly study of the relations between Poland and the Teutonic Knights, the precursors of the founders of the Prussian State. Before the publication of this book and after that of the Trilogy, Sienkiewicz wrote *Quo Vadis?*, the novel which has been

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translated into thirty-five languages, including Oriental tongues, has been widely produced on the stage and in films, and has gained a popularity outside its own country which is unique among novels of the whole world.

Quo Vadis? is the only one of Sienkiewicz's historical novels that is not founded on Polish history: and paradoxically it is the only one of which the ordinary British reader has ever heard, and the only association that he has with the name of Sienkiewicz. It may appear a deviation from Sienkiewicz's ordinary rule that he departed from the history of his own nation and devoted his pen to a historical romance on the Rome of Nero. But this is not the case. The leading motive of *Quo Vadis?* is the triumph of Christianity. But we know from the testimony of Sienkiewicz's compatriots, to say nothing of internal evidence, that in depicting the persecuted handful of Christians pitted against the whole weight of imperial Rome, and destined to be victorious over it by the might of their spiritual force, the Polish novelist, writing during the captivity of Poland, had also in mind the position of his own nation under the oppression that was striving to stamp out her existence. It has in fact been said by a Polish scholar that only a Pole could have written *Quo Vadis?* It is a significant point that the heroine of the story is of Sarmatian birth, and that her servant Ursus is of the same race and has the soul and the character of a Polish peasant. Moreover, the fundamental motive of *Quo Vadis?*, lying beneath all its splendid imagery and drama, and plainly indicated in the scene of St. Peter's martyrdom and in the concluding words of the book, is the conquest of brute force by moral strength and sacrifice: a tenet integral to Polish national psychology and especially inculcated by the great poet-mystics of the early nineteenth century. Sienkiewicz himself several years after the publication of *Quo Vadis?* stated that steeping himself in his favourite historian Tacitus he was allured by the project of contrasting in a work of fiction the pagan world representing material power with the Christian world as the representative of spiritual power alone. 'That thought,' he said, 'attracted me as a Pole by its idea of the victory of the spirit over material strength; it fascinated me as an artist by the

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splendid forms in which the ancient world knew how to garb itself.' Sienkiewicz knew Rome well. He wandered about the city and the Roman Campagna with his Tacitus in his hand. His idea matured. In his words: 'It only remained to find my starting-point. The Quo Vadis? chapel, the sight of the Basilica of St. Peter, the Alban Hills, the Tre Fontane—they did the rest.'

All the splendour of Sienkiewicz's colour, of which he is a master and which his native language in its flexibility and tone gradations is peculiarly fitted to reproduce, has its full play in this picture of the magnificence and the corruption of the imperial city. The banquet in Nero's palace, where the very walls breathe murder and conspiracy, and the gaiety of the jewelled and bedecked guests cloaks their secret deadly apprehension of the morrow; the fire of Rome blotting out the earth with a pall of smoke over which the sky bursts into flame that seems as though it would engulf the universe while the city itself becomes a pandemonium of horror; the torture of the Christians in the Colosseum and the Vatican gardens—such scenes as these brand themselves in the reader's memory. Two worlds are contrasted in *Quo Vadis?*: the pagan world with its luxury, its cruelty, its moral rottenness and its mortal weariness, and against it the first adherents of Christianity, poor, obscure, possessing little to commend them to the outer eye, but animated by the breath of a new life, unknown and incomprehensible to heathen Rome, but which will in the end bring that Rome to the dust. Against this background Sienkiewicz vividly portrays the characters who make up his story. For the most part they are no puppets, but beings of flesh and blood. We would single out Nero, a compound of lust, bestial brutality, and buffoonery, Petronius, *arbiter elegantiarum*, witty, fascinating, wholly immoral, who has no outlook beyond the epicurean enjoyment of the hour, Vinicius, the hot-headed and dissolute Roman youth who is gradually won to Christianity, and the Christian Ursus, the simple-hearted and devoted servant of Ligia. Sienkiewicz's writings are rich in humour. *Quo Vadis?* is no exception. Petronius is always diverting; and the character of Chilo, the Greek charlatan and traitor, before the tragedy he has brought about changes his heart and leads him to a

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Christian's death in the arena, supplies amusement of a more obvious description.

The love story of *Quo Vadis* ? is at once more subtle and more integral to the psychology of the plot than is the case with the loves of the Trilogy or *The Knights of the Cross*. If the love of the young pagan Vinicius for the Christian girl Ligia is on the face of it a hackneyed theme, Sienkiewicz treats it on lines that redeem it from the commonplace. The development of Vinicius's pagan passion that at first will not shrink from dishonouring the woman he desires, who on her side rejects his love for the satisfaction, not of her heart, but of her conscience, and which love, by degrees, changes its nature in measure as Vinicius is won to the Christian faith, is among the finest studies in the book. It gives rise to one of its most beautiful scenes when, sitting in the moonlight with his beloved, Vinicius confesses his joy in Christ who has immortalized his and Ligia's love; and at that moment the lugubrious roaring of the lions imprisoned in the circuses of Rome breaks across his words with sinister forebodings—before the lovers are parted.

Sienkiewicz is not as happy in his delineation of the subterranean Christian life of Rome as in that of its pagan element. His characterization of the individual Christian, with the exception of Ursus, lacks the grip of his pagan types. True, he strikes a profound truth when he represents these apparently dull people unhesitatingly laying down their lives for their faith; and the scenes in which they face a horrible death with the heroism of the martyr, stand with the most powerful and the most terrible of Sienkiewicz's pages. The wealth of detail and colour that Sienkiewicz expends upon his great canvases leads him in fact to enter into the recital of the torments devised by the ingenuity of Roman barbarity with a realism that the sensitive reader may find excessive. But his Christians are, for the most part, uninteresting and unattractive: in the case of the fanatical priest Crispus both unpleasant and unconvincing. Ligia herself, the heroine of the story, though drawn with the charm and tenderness of Sienkiewicz's women, has little individuality, and it is her situation rather than her character that holds the reader. The two apostles, St. Peter and St. Paul, are among the Christian

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figures of *Quo Vadis*?, and their presentment is the weakest point of the book. No doubt the introduction into fiction of the personages of the New Testament is beset with difficulties; and these were beyond the power even of Sienkiewicz to overcome with success. We cannot recognize the robust personality of the Peter of the Gospels and the Acts in Sienkiewicz's portrayal, which could stand for that of any benevolent old man. St. Paul is still more lifeless, and plays so small a part in the story that a Polish critic suggests he would have been better omitted. Yet Sienkiewicz rises to the height of his subject when the character of St. Peter merges into that of his apostolate, when the saint, led to his martyrdom, no victim but the conqueror for all time, turns to Rome, bathed in the setting sun, and gives his last blessing to the Eternal City—'urbi et orbi.' And the summing up of *Quo Vadis*? after Nero and Petronius, both representative of pagan Rome, have gone into the shadows, the one with ignominy, the other resigning himself with a jest to annihilation, is the keynote of the book: that whatever the forces assembled against it the power of the spirit conquers and reigns eternally.

MONICA M. GARDNER

Publishers' Note

Monica M. Gardner died in London, a victim of enemy action, while preparing this edition for press. The Sienkiewicz Bibliography was completed by her friend, Mary Corbridge-Patkaniowska. Miss Gardner was a devoted friend of Poland, a rare Polish scholar, and a pioneer in this country of the academic study of Poland's language and literature. She was the author of monographs on *Adam Mickiewicz, the National Poet of Poland*; *Zygmunt Krasiński, the 'Anonymous' Poet of Poland*; and *Henryk Sienkiewicz, the Patriot Novelist of Poland*. Among her historical studies are *Poland, a Study in National Idealism*, and biographies of *Kościuszko* and *Queen Jadwiga*. At the time of her death she was also engaged in the translation of Professor O. Halecki's *History of Poland*, which was published in 1942.

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THE PRINCIPAL WORKS OF HENRYK SIENKIEWICZ

(The original Polish title is given with the date of first publication, followed by the title or titles of published English translations.)

NOVELS

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Ogniem i mieczem	1884 (<i>With Fire and Sword</i>)
Potop	1886 (<i>The Deluge</i>)
Pan Wołodyjowski	1888 (<i>Pan Michael: Pan Wołodyjowski</i>)
Bez dogmatu	1891 (<i>Without Dogma</i>)
Rodzina Połanieckich	1895 (<i>Children of the Soil: The Połaniecki Family</i>)
Quo Vadis?	1896 (<i>Quo Vadis?</i>)
Krzyżacy	1900 (<i>The Knights of the Cross</i>)
Na polu chwały	1907 (<i>On the Field of Glory</i>)
Wiry	1910 (<i>Whirlpools</i>)
W pustyni i puszcy	1911 (<i>Through the Desert. In Desert and Wilderness</i>)
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TRAVEL IMPRESSIONS

Listy z podróży po Ameryce	1876-8
Listy z Afryki	1892

DRAMA

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QUO VADIS ?

TRADITION has it that, as Saint Peter was fleeing from Rome to escape the persecutions of the Emperor Nero, he met Christ on the Appian Way, and asked Him, "Quo vadis?" ("Whither goest thou?"); to which the Saviour replied, "To Rome, to be crucified anew, inasmuch as thou art abandoning my sheep." Hence the title of the following work.

PART I

I

It was nearly midday when Petronius awoke. As usual, he felt very tired when he did so, for he had spent the previous evening at one of Nero's banquets. For a long while past his health had been failing, and his moments of awakening becoming increasingly painful; but on every occasion the morning bath and regular massage had so stimulated his sluggish circulation and restored his strength that he had left the oleotechium (the finishing room in the baths) a man of sparkling eyes, and gifted with an air of grace that even Otho could never have rivalled. In short, he had earned his title of "The Arbiter of Fashion."

On the morrow, therefore, of the banquet (where with Nero, Lucan, and Seneca he had discussed the question whether woman is possessed of a soul) he was lying upon a massage-dais, with, for covering, a sheet of snowy Egyptian byssus. Two brawny balneatores, or bath attendants, were kneading his muscles with hands dipped in oil, and his eyes were closed as he waited for the warmth of the laconicum to help that of these attendants' hands in permeating his body and banishing his lassitude.

At length he raised his eyelids. First he asked what the weather was like; after which he inquired about some gems which the jeweller Idomeneus had promised to submit for his inspection. In reply he was told that the weather was beautiful, and that a light breeze was blowing from the Alban Hills; also that the jeweller had not yet made his appearance. Closing his eyes again, he was about to be removed to the tepidarium when, raising a curtain, the nomenclator announced the presence of Marcus Vinicius.

Petronius ordered the visitor to be shown into the tepidarium, and had himself conveyed thither. Vinicius was the son of one of Petronius' elder sisters—a lady who had married Marcus Vinicius, a man of consular standing in the service of the late Emperor Tiberius. At the present time the younger Vinicius was serving in Cor-

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bulo's expedition against the Parthians, but had returned to Rome on the conclusion of an armistice. Petronius felt a certain affection for the lad, since the latter was a finely made athlete who, even in his most debauched moments, knew how to hold his own in æsthetic circles—an ability which Petronius prized above everything.

"Hail, Petronius!" cried the young man. "May all the gods bestow upon you their favours, but more especially Asklepios and Kypris."

"Welcome to Rome!" replied Petronius, disengaging his hands from the folds of the delicate karbas in which he was wrapped. "May your rest be sweet after the war. What news of the Armenians? And during your sojourn in Asia did you penetrate also to Bithynia?"

Though now famous for his effeminate tastes and love of pleasure, Petronius had once been governor of Bithynia, and a governor at once firm and just; wherefore he always recalled that period with gratification, since it had proved what he would and could have become had the fancy seized him to exert himself.

"Yes; once I visited Heraklea in order to raise some reinforcements for Corbulo," replied Vinicius.

"Heraklea? Ah, it was there that I used to know a maiden from Colchis for whom I would willingly exchange every divorced woman in Rome, not excepting even Poppæa. But these are bygone tales. Tell me, rather, what is passing on the Parthian frontier; though I do not find these Vologeses and Tiridates and Tigranes at all diverting—these barbarians who, young Arulanus insists, walk upon all fours in their own homes, and imitate men only when they are in our presence. Nevertheless there is much talk of them in Rome; doubtless because it is dangerous to talk of anything else."

"But for Corbulo, these wars would have had a sorry termination."

"Corbulo? By Bacchus, but he is a veritable god of war, a true son of Mars, a great general, a man at once fiery, loyal, and a fool. I love him, and not least because he can make Nero afraid."

"Corbulo is *not* a fool."

"Perhaps not. But, as Pyrrho truly says, folly is as good as wisdom, and in no way different."

Then Vinicius began to talk about the war, but Petronius only closed his eyes; whereupon the younger man changed the conversation by inquiring after his uncle's health.

Upon this Petronius opened his eyes again.

His health? It was by no means good; although he had not yet reached the point attained by young Sissena,

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whose senses were so blunted that one morning he had asked as he sat in his bath : " Am I or am I not sitting down ? " Nevertheless Petronius was not doing at all well. Vinicius had been good enough to recommend him to the protection of Asklepios and of Kypris, but for his part he (Petronius) had no faith in Asklepios. For instance, did any one know whose son Asklepios was—whether Arsinous' or Koronis' ? When one has doubts even of one's maternity, how can one speak of one's father ? Indeed, in those days, who could be certain of being the son of one's own sire ?

Here Petronius smiled. Then he continued :

" Two years ago I sent Epidaurus three dozen live blackbirds and a drinking-cup. I said to myself: Even if that will do me no good, at least it will do me no harm. And if in the world there are still left persons who sacrifice to the gods, I think that each of them must reason as I do—the muledrivers of the Porta Capena alone excepted. And in addition to Asklepios, I have had dealings with the devotees of Asklepios, as a cure for bladder trouble. This was last year only, and although they had recourse to various incubations, I could see that one and all were charlatans. However, the world is built upon knavery, and life itself is but a piece of the same. Even the soul is an illusion. A man must be clever indeed to distinguish agreeable illusions from illusions which are not so. For instance, I have my drying-room warmed with cedar-wood and sprinkled with amber, for the reason that I prefer good smells to bad. But as for that Kypris to whom you have just recommended me, it is probably owing to his kind offices that I have got these pangs in the right leg, and am suffering so much. On the other hand, give me a sweet goddess as a healer, and I have an idea that you too will soon be sacrificing white pigeons on her altars."

" Yes," replied Vinicius, " Though the arrows of the Parthians never reached me, I have been grazed by those of Cupid—in an unforeseen fashion, only a few stadia from the city gates."

" By the white-kneed Graces, but you are indeed telling me something!" cried Petronius.

" As a matter of fact, I have come to ask your advice about it."

At that moment the epilatores again made their appearance, and busied themselves with Petronius, while Marcus entered a bath of tepid water.

" Ah! I suppose it would be superfluous to ask if your love is returned ? " went on Petronius as he contemplated

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Marcus' marble frame. "Had Lysippus seen you, you would by now have been adorning the Palatine Gate, under the guise of a youthful Hercules."

The young man laughed, and plunged into the bath; splashing, as he did so, a mosaic which represented Ilera imploring Somnus to lull Jupiter to rest.

The bath completed, Vinicius was handing himself over to the deft fingers of the epilatores when a lector, or reader, entered with a bronze case of papyri.

"Do you wish to listen to this man?" asked Petronius.

"If it is a question of one of your own works, yes," replied Vinicius. "Otherwise I should prefer to talk. In these days poets run up against one at every street corner."

"Quite so. Never can one leave one's door without being confronted by some poet, gesticulating like a monkey. When Agrippa returned from the East he took them for a set of madmen. Cæsar, on the contrary, writes verses himself, and every one follows his example. No one, however, is allowed to write *better* verses than Cæsar's; wherefore I am growing a little afraid on behalf of friend Lucan. I write nothing but prose; and prose with which I regale no one's ears—no, not even my own. What the lector was going to read us just now was the 'Codicilli' of poor Fabricius Veiento."

"Why 'poor'?"

"Because he has been invited not to busy himself with affairs until he has received further orders. I need hardly say that that invitation is a blunder. His book—an indifferent and wearisome work—began to be sought after only when its author had been sent into exile. In fact, on every side one hears cries of 'Scandal, scandal!' when all the time we see portrayed but a pale image of the real thing. But Veiento's book one reads in fear lest one should encounter therein one's own portrait, as well as in hope that it may contain the portrait of one of one's friends. At the Aviranus Library a hundred scribes are engaged in copying it out from dictation."

"Then *your* misdeeds do not figure in the book?"

"Yes; but the author has made a mistake, inasmuch as I am at once more wicked and less insipid than he has represented me to be. Pace Seneca, Musonius, and Thræseas, it would seem to be a mistake to draw distinctions between the just and the unjust. Yet this is not to say that I cannot distinguish between the ugly and the beautiful, although even this Bronzebeard of a Nero—this man who is at once poet, charioteer, singer, dancer, and actor—cannot draw the distinction."

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"Nevertheless I am sorry for Fabricius. He was good company."

"It is conceit has ruined him. Every one suspected, yet no one knew anything for certain. He himself could put no rein upon his tongue, but confided his secret to every chance comer.—Have you heard the story of Rufinus?"

"No."

"Come into the frigidarium, and I will tell it you."

They passed into the cooling-room, and seated themselves in silken-lined niches, while around them a rose-coloured fountain diffused an odour of violets. With eyes turned towards a bronze faun who was gluing his animal lips to those of a recalcitrant nymph, Vinicius continued:

"That faun there is right. *That* is what is best in life."

"Do you think so? On the contrary, you love war, whereas for me it has no attractions—my fangs have grown too blunt for it. Each to his own taste. Bronzebeard adores song—his own song especially, while old Scaurus loves a certain Corinthian vase—so much so that he falls to kissing it o' nights when he finds himself unable to sleep. Tell me, do you ever write poetry?"

"No. I have never been able to compass a single hexameter."

"Do you play the lute, then, or sing?"

"No."

"Nor drive a chariot?"

"Once at Antioch I took part in some races, but unsuccessfully."

"Ah! Then I feel easier. To what party at the Hippodrome do you belong?"

"To the Greens."

"Then I feel reassured; and the more so because, large though your fortune may be, you are not as rich as Pallas or as Seneca. Of course, one *may* sing and accompany oneself on the lute; one *may* deliver speeches; one *may* drive a chariot: but far better is it to do none of these things. The best course of all is to admire the arts—as Bronzebeard practises them. Otherwise you are handsome, and Poppæa might fall in love with you. Yes, *there* lies the danger. . . . Yet, no; she has had too much experience for that. Of love she had enough with her first two husbands, and for the third husband she has other views. Would you believe it, but that fool of an Otho still adores her to distraction. He walks to and fro on the cliffs of Hispania, and sighs and sighs! Indeed, he has so completely dropped his former habits, and has begun to take so little care of himself, that three hours a day suffice for

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him to effect his hair-dressing! Who would have believed it?"

"Ah, I can understand Otho," Vinicius replied; "although, in his place, I should act at least *differently*."

"How, then?"

"First of all I should recruit trusty legions of mountaineers. They are fine soldiers, those Iberians."

"Ah, Vinicius, Vinicius! I hate to say it, but to do that would be beyond your power. Such things are *done* rather than talked about—talked about even hypothetically. As for me, I should make light of Poppæa and Bronzebeard. Perhaps I should enrol some Iberians in my legions, but they would be Iberian *women*, not men. Most of all should I write epigrams, and read them to no one. I should never imitate poor Rufinus."

"Tell me his history."

"Yes, I will do so in the unctorium."

There, however, Vinicius' attention was distracted by the marvellous slaves who were in attendance. Two of them—a couple of negresses—began to rub the bodies of the bathers with Oriental perfumes. Others—Phrygians skilled in the art of hair-dressing—plied steel mirrors and combs. Lastly, a couple of Greek girls from Kos stood waiting to drape their masters' togas in statuesque folds.

"By Jupiter who gathers the clouds," said Marcus Vinicius, "but this is indeed a choice assortment!"

"Yes. I prefer quality to quantity," replied Petronius. "In fact, my entire staff comprises four hundred persons. No one but a parvenu requires a larger staff than that."

"Finer figures one could find nowhere, even in Bronzebeard's palace," said Vinicius.

"You are my kinsman," remarked Petronius kindly. "Moreover, I am neither so egotistical as Barsus nor so austere as Aulus Plautius."

Vinicius raised his head with an abrupt movement.

"What made you think of Aulus Plautius?" he asked. "Are you aware that when I sprained my wrist at the city gates I stayed in his house for fifteen days? A slave doctor of his, named Merion, cured me; and it is precisely of that that I wish to speak."

"Really? Are you by any chance captivated with Pomponia? Then I am sorry for you, for, though not young, she is at least virtuous. Which is a most unpleasing combination!"

"No, alas! Not with Pomponia."

"Then with whom?"

"Ah, if I but knew! The fact is that I cannot say

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whether her true name is Lygia or Callina. At home she is known as Lygia, for the reason that she comes of the country of the Lygians; but her true barbaric name is Callina. A strange establishment, that house of Plautius!—full of people, yet as silent as the fastnesses of Subiacum! For twelve days I had not a notion that a goddess dwelt there; but, one morning, I caught sight of her, bathing in a fountain under the trees. By the foam whence Venus sprang I swear to you that the rays of the dawn played right through her body!—although at first I thought the rising sun would disperse the vision, even as he disperses the morning mist. Twice since have I seen her; nor from that time forth have I known peace of mind, have I ever given a thought to other desires. Yes, no longer do I care for what the city can give me. No longer do I yearn for women, or gold, or Corinthian bronzes, or amber, or mother-of-pearl, or wine, or feasting. I yearn only for Lygia. Petronius, my soul stretches out its arms to her as, in the mosaic of your tepidarium, Somnus stretches out his arms to Paisythea. Day and night I long for her."

"If she is a slave, go and buy her."

"But she is *not* a slave."

"What, then, is she? One of Plautius' freedwomen?"

"No. Never having been a slave, she cannot be a freedwoman."

"Then *what*?"

"I do not know. A king's daughter, perhaps."

"You interest me, Vinicius."

"The story will not take long in the telling. Per-adventure you have heard of Vannius, King of the Suevi, who, having been expelled from his own country, lived for a while in Rome, where he won some renown through his prowess at dice, as well as through his skill at driving a chariot? Well, Drusus restored him to his throne, and for a time Vannius ruled the country with credit, and made some fortunate expeditions; but, later, he took to fleecing not only his neighbours, but also his subjects; with the result that his nephews Varigio and Sido (their father was Vibilius, King of the Hermanduri) hatched a scheme to induce him to return to Rome and once more try his luck with the dice."

"Ah, I remember that. It was in Claudius' time—not very long ago."

"Yes. War broke out, and Vannius summoned to his aid the Yazigi, while his nephews stirred up the Lygians. The latter—who have a great weakness for plunder, and had heard of Vannius' wealth—mobilised in such numbers that Claudius Cæsar began to tremble for the security even

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of our own frontiers; so much so that, though he always disliked taking part in barbarians' quarrels, he sent orders to Atelius Hister, commander of the Danubian Legion, to keep a sharp eye upon the fortunes of the struggle, and in no case to permit the peace of Rome to be troubled. Upon that Hister exacted from the Lygians a promise not to violate the frontiers; and to this demand they not only consented in word, but also gave hostages, with, among those hostages, the wife and daughter of their leader (probably you know that, when on an expedition, these barbarians march with all their womenkind). Lygia is that leader's daughter."

"How come you to know all this?"

"Aulus Plautius told me; and in very truth the Lygians kept their promise not to pass the frontiers. These barbarians rise like a hurricane, and disappear like the same; and in this manner did the Lygians disappear—their heads adorned with aurochs' antlers. Although they had got the better of Vannius' Suevi and the Yazigi, their king had fallen; so they retired with their booty, while the hostages remained in Hister's hands. Shortly afterwards the mother also died, and, to get rid of the child, Hister dispatched the latter to Pomponius, Governor-General of Germany; who, on the conclusion of the war with the Catti, returned to Rome, where Claudius, as you know, accorded him the honour of a triumph. On the festive day the young girl walked behind the conqueror's chariot; but since the hostages could not be treated permanently as captives, and Pomponius was at a loss what to do with the maiden, he sent her, after the ceremony, to his sister, Pomponia Græcina, who is Plautius' wife. In the Auluses' house—a house where everything is virtuous, from the master and the mistress to the very poultry—she has grown up as virtuous as Græcina herself (alas!), and so beautiful that, beside her, Poppæa would look like a figure of autumn placed cheek by jowl with an apple from the Garden of the Hesperides."

"Well?"

"I merely repeat to you that since the moment when I saw the light of the sun playing through her body I have been in love with her."

"Is she, then, transparent like a lamprey—or, rather, like a sardine?"

"Do not jest, Petronius. A brilliant vestment may cover a grievous wound. Moreover, know that, on my return from Asia, I passed a night in the Temple of Mopsus, who appeared to me in a vision, and informed me that love would profoundly influence my life."

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"Well, I have heard Pliny say that one ought to believe in dreams rather than in the gods; and perhaps he was right. In any case there exists a divinity in whose presence my jests would show the white feather: and the divinity in question is Venus Genitrix. It is she who brings souls together, who unites beings and things. It was she who caused the world to arise from chaos. Whether, in doing so, she did well is open to dispute, but at least her power is obvious. One may not exactly bless her, but at all events one has to take her into account."

"Alas, Petronius, philosophical dissertations are less rarely met with than good advice."

"Then tell me precisely what you want."

"I want Lygia. I want my arms, which now embrace the void, to embrace *her*. I want to drink in her breath. Had she been a slave, I would have given Aulus, in exchange for her, a present of a hundred young girls fresh from the market. I should like to keep her a captive until the day when my head has become as white as the snows of Soractum in winter."

"Then I understand that she is not a slave, but forms part of Plautius' household? That being so, and since she is a foundling, she might be considered as an alumna or foster-child, and consequently Plautius could cede her to you if he wished."

"I think you cannot possibly know Pomponia Græcina. She and her husband are so attached to Lygia that it is as though she were their own child."

"Oh, I know Pomponia—a veritable cypress-tree of a woman. Were she not Aulus' wife, she would be sought after to act as a funeral mute. Never since Julia's death has she left off wearing the black stole, and already she looks as though she were walking through the field that is strewn with asphodels. Besides, she is the wife of no more than one man—and therefore, among our Roman ladies who have been four or five times divorced, something of a phoenix. By the way, have you heard that a phoenix has just been hatched—*really* so, according to the accounts—in Upper Egypt? 'Tis a phenomenon that has not occurred for five hundred years!"

"Petronius, Petronius! Let us speak of the phoenix another day."

"Well, what else am I to talk of, dear Marcus? I know that, though Aulus Plautius blames my mode of life, he has a weakness for me, owing to the fact that he is aware that never at any time have I been an informer like Domitius Afer, Tigellinus, and the rest of Ahenobarbus' gang of associates. Though I make no pretence to be a

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Stoic, I have frequently felt offended at acts of Nero's which Seneca and Burrus have winked at. If you think, therefore, that I could get anything for you out of Aulus, I beg to offer you my services."

"At least you can influence him. Moreover, your fertility of mind is inexhaustible. Yes, say a word to Plautius."

"You exaggerate both my influence and my ingenuity. However, I *will* speak to him as soon as he returns."

"He returned two days ago."

"In that case let us pass into the triclinium, where breakfast awaits us. Then, fortified with the meal, we will have ourselves conveyed to Plautius' house."

"Petronius," said Marcus as he pointed to a statue of Hermes which represented its owner brandishing a staff, "I have always loved you; but henceforth there shall stand among my household gods an image as beautiful as that one yonder, and to it I will offer sacrifice. By the light of Helios, if Paris in any way resembled you, Helen's conduct becomes intelligible."

In this outburst there was no less sincerity than flattery, for Petronius, though the older and the less athletic of the pair, was nevertheless handsomer than Vinicius. In fact, the women of Rome admired the "Arbiter of Fashion" as much for his shapely form as for his subtle intellect; and that admiration could be detected even on the faces of the two young girls from Kos who, at that moment, were arranging the folds of his toga—one of the damsels, in particular (her name was Eunice), regarding him with a look of humble ecstasy in her eyes. To this, however, he paid no attention as, with a smile, he quoted Seneca's *mot* on women: "Animal impudens, etc.;" after which he laid his arm upon the young man's shoulder and conducted him to the triclinium.

In the unctorium the two young Greeks, with the Phrygians and the negresses, then began to put away the pots and perfumes; until presently there appeared, under the curtain which hung before the door of the frigidarium, the heads of the balneatores, and a light "Psst" was heard. At the call one of the Greek girls, with the Phrygians and the negresses, left the apartment, for this was the moment when the baths usually became a scene of sport and debauchery which the inspector of the household did nothing to prevent, since, at times, he himself took part in it. Petronius also suspected that these exercises were performed, but closed his eyes to them like an indulgent master.

Only Eunice now remained behind in the unctorium.

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For a moment or two she listened with bended head to the voices and laughter which were dying away in the direction of the *laconicum*. Then she took up the stool of ivory and amber upon which Petronius had been sitting, and carried it to the statue of her master. There, standing on the stool, she threw her arms around the neck of the image, and, with her hair overflowing her loins in a sea of gold, and her naked body pressed against the marble, she glued her lips to those of Petronius' counterfeit.

II

AFTER the morning meal—a meal which the two friends began at an hour when simpler mortals had long ago finished the *prandium* or midday repast—Petronius proposed a light *siesta*.

"It is as yet too early to go out visiting," he said. "True, some people begin their visits at daybreak, and perhaps it is a custom at once venerable and essentially Roman; but, for myself, I consider it a barbaric notion. Afternoon is the time for that: the sun ought first to have crossed the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus, and to be slanting downwards over the Forum. In autumn one still gets sultry days, and it is pleasant then to listen to the murmur of the fountain in the atrium, and, after the thousand steps of one's constitutional, to doze in the red light which filters through the purple of the half-drawn *velarium*."

Of this proposal Vinicius recognised the reasonableness; so for a while they paced to and fro as they discussed what was being said on the Palatine and in the city. They even philosophised a little. Then Petronius entered his *cubiculum* to sleep. Half an hour later he reappeared, and, calling for *verbena*, rubbed his hands and temples with the perfume.

"You cannot think," he said, "how this revives and restores one. Now I am ready."

A litter had long been waiting in readiness, so the friends took their places in it, and directed the bearers to convey them to the house of Aulus Plautius, in the *Vicus Patricius*. Petronius' *insula* was situated on the southern slope of the Palatine, near the *Carinæ*; wherefore their nearest way was to pass below the Forum. Petronius, however, wished also to call at the shop of Idomeneus the goldsmith, and for that reason the litter would need to go by way of the *Vicus Apollinis* and the Forum, and through the

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Vicus Sceleratus, at the corner of which there stood a multitude of traders' stalls.

The gigantic negro bearers raised the litter and set out, preceded by slaves. Petronius kept inhaling the verbena scent on the palms of his hands, and seemed moody.

"If," he said presently, "your woodland nymph is not a slave, what is there to prevent her leaving Plautius' establishment and entering your own? You could gorge her with love and riches, even as I do my divine Chrysothemis—of whom, however, I am about as tired as she is of me."

Marcus shook his head.

"No?" inquired Petronius. "Why, at the worst, the affair would be submitted to the Emperor; and you may be sure that, with my influence to help you, our friend Bronzebeard would be favourable."

"Ah, you do not know Lygia," replied Vinicius.

"Then allow me to ask you whether *you* know her, otherwise than by sight? Have you spoken to her? Have you confessed to her your passion?"

"I saw her, as I have told you, when she was bathing, and on two subsequent occasions have met her. During my stay in Aulus' house I occupied a wing that is set apart for guests, and, owing to my sprained wrist, could not appear at the common board. The evening before my departure I met Lygia at supper, but was unable to say a word to her, for the reason that I had to listen to Aulus' tales of his victories in Britain, and his complaints concerning the decline of small properties in Italy. Even to-day, if we are spared his victories and the small properties, it will be but to hear him groan about the effeminate manners of the present day. Just think! These people keep pheasants in their aviaries, yet will not allow them to be cooked, on the principle that each pheasant thus devoured would hasten the end of the Roman dominion! The second time I met Lygia I did so in the garden, near the cistern, where she was watching some irises. You should have seen my knees!—though, by the shield of Hercules, I swear they did not tremble when swarms of Parthians were hurling themselves upon our handful of Romans! They trembled near that cistern, though. As tongue-tied as a youth who still wears the bulla, I could not utter a word—I could merely look at her beseechingly."

Petronius regarded his companion with a sort of envy.

"Then you did not speak to her?"

"Recovering myself, I told her that, just when I was about to leave the hospitable mansion, I had discovered that suffering there was to be preferred to pleasure else-

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where, and sickness to health. She listened to my words — seeming as agitated as I was — with bent head, as she traced lines in the yellow sand with her watering-pot. Then, raising her eyes, she lowered them again to the lines which she had made, and, once more raising them, fixed them upon me as though she were going to ask me a question. But suddenly she fled away like a hamadryad before a sensual faun."

"She has fine eyes, then?"

"Like the sea. Yes, I could have bathed in them as in the sea. The Archipelago itself is not more blue. The next moment one of Plautius' sons came running to me, to ask me some question or another, but I could not understand what he said."

"Great Athene," cried Petronius, "I pray you remove from this stripling's eyes the bandage with which Cupid has bound them, lest he break his head against the pillars of the Temple of Venus!"

Then, turning to Vinicius, he continued:

"O bud of spring upon the tree of life, O first green shoot upon the vine, it is not to Plautius' house that I ought to take you, but to that of Gelocius, where there is a school for youths who know not the world."

"And wherefore?"

"What was it the maiden traced in the sand? Was it not the name of Cupid? Was it not a heart pierced by one of his arrows? Was it not something which showed that the satyrs had already whispered in the ear of the nymph some all-important secrets? Is it possible that you did not note the signs?"

"I have worn the toga longer than you think," replied Vinicius, "and had remarked those signs even before the little Plautius addressed me. I am not ignorant of the fact that in Rome, as in Greece, young girls trace in sand what their lips dare not avow. Guess for me, therefore, what it was that she drew?"

"If I had not already guessed, I should never be able to do so now."

"It was a fish."

"A what?"

"A fish. Did it mean to signify that in her veins there ran only blood which was fast cooling? I know nothing of these things, but you to whom I am a bud in spring may be able to explain the sign."

"Nay. Pliny is the right man to consult. He is an expert in fishes."

There the conversation came to an end, for the litter was moving through streets full of bustle. Presently,

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by way of the Vicus Apollinis, the travellers arrived at the Forum.

Crowds of people were walking to and fro under the arches of the basilica of Julius Cæsar, and still greater numbers were seated on the steps of the temple dedicated to Castor and Pollux, or making the round of Vesta's little sanctuary—looking, amid this marble scenery, like so many coloured swarms of butterflies or beetles. Above, near the huge steps of Jupiter's temple—the fane consecrated to “Jovi Optimo Maximo”—there surged yet further crowds. At the Rostra people were listening to chance orators; hawkers were vending fruit, wine, and water mingled with fig-juice; charlatans were extolling the virtue of their drugs; diviners, discoverers of hidden treasures, and interpreters of dreams were vaunting their art; while through the hubbub there sounded, at intervals, the strains of musical instruments. Invalids and devotees were carrying baskets of sacrifice to their gods, while on the grain shed from these offerings upon the paving-stones pigeons were feeding, and ever and anon rising with a clatter of wings, and then again settling where the eddying crowd chanced to have left a vacant space. Groups of people would gather in front of litters whence there happened to peep a charming woman's face or the blasé mask of some knight or senator; and at times parties of soldiers or of constables would push their way, with measured tread, among groups which were growing too noisy. Everywhere the Greek tongue was to be heard as much as the Latin.

Vinicius, who had not seen the city for a long while, looked with curiosity at the Forum Romanum, which dominated the tide of people, and was, in its turn, dominated by that tide. “The Haunt of the Quirites—without the Quirites,” said Petronius, who had guessed his companion's thoughts. True enough, the Roman element was almost submerged in this throng. To be seen in that place were negroes of Ethiopia; flaxen-haired giants from the dim countries of the North; Britons; Gauls; Germans; cross-eyed Servians; men from the banks of the Euphrates and the Indus (with beards dyed brick-red); riverside Syrians (with gentle black eyes); bony Arabs of the desert; hollow-chested Jews; constantly smiling Egyptians; Numidians; Africans; Greeks from Hellas (who ruled the city equally with the Romans, but ruled through the media of science, art, and astuteness); Greeks from the Isles, from Asia Minor, from Egypt, from Italy, and from Narbonne; priests of Serapis, carrying palms; priests of Isis, whose altars attracted more worshippers than did

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those of Jupiter Capitolinus; priests of Cybele, carrying wisps of maize; priests of sundry nomad divinities; mitred oriental dancers; vendors of amulets; snake charmers and seers, as well as a host of indefinite folk who came every week to draw grain from the storerooms on the Tiber, or to fight for lottery tickets in the circuses, or to spend their nights in ruined houses on the further side of the river, and their days in crypts, in the infamous taverns of Suburra, on the Pontus Milvius, or in front of the insulæ of the wealthy, whence from time to time they were thrown the leavings of the slaves' tables.

With this rabble Petronius was familiar, and on every side Vinicius' ears caught the words, "It is he!" Beloved of the mob for his liberality, Petronius had grown in notoriety since the day when the public first learnt that he had intervened with Cæsar to prevent a general massacre of the slaves (without distinction of age or sex) who had been in the service of Prefect Pedanius Secundus—a massacre ordered for the sole reason that one of them had assassinated the monster. Petronius had declared that the matter would not have concerned him had he not been the "Arbiter of Fashion." Nevertheless he had represented privately to Cæsar that such a massacre, being worthy of Scythians rather than of Romans, was bound to affront the æsthetic sentiment.

In truth Petronius cared but little for the people's recognition, for he remembered that the same people had loved the Britannicus whom Nero had poisoned, the Agrippina whom that monarch had caused to be assassinated, the Octavia who had been suffocated, the Rubellius Plautius who had been sent into exile, and the Thræseas who daily, on awaking, expected a sentence of death. Popularity, therefore, was an ill-omened possession, and our sceptic had not ceased to be also superstitious. Moreover, Petronius despised the mob for two reasons—firstly, because he was an aristocrat, and secondly, because he was an æsthete. Persons who smelt of roast beans, and could shout themselves hoarse, and sweat as they played mora at the corners of the streets or under peristylia, did not deserve the name of men.

The litter came to a halt before Aviranus' bookshop. Petronius alighted, and bought an elegant manuscript, which he handed to Vinicius.

"Here is a present for you," he said.

"I thank you," replied Vinicius, looking at the title. *The Satyricon*? A new work, then? And by whom?"

"By myself. But since I do not wish to follow in the footsteps of Rufinus, whose history I am about to relate

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to you, nor in those of Fabricius Veiento, I take care that no one shall know of it. Do not you either mention it to any one, I pray you."

"You told me that you have never written verses," said Vinicius. "Yet here I see verses interlarding the prose."

"When reading the work, turn your attention to the feast of Trimalchion. As for verses, I became disgusted with them on the day that Nero wrote an epic. Vitellius, to relieve himself, makes use of an ivory palette which he inserts into his throat, while others use flamingo feathers dipped in oil, or a decoction of wild thyme; but I just re-read Nero's poems, and the result is instantaneous. Thereafter I can praise them, if not with a clear conscience, at all events with a purged stomach."

With these words he stopped the litter before the shop of Idomeneus the goldsmith, and, after attending to the matter of the gems, set out again for the house of Aulus Plautius.

"On the way," he said, "I will relate to you, as an instance of the conceit of an author, the story of Rufinus."

However, he had not begun his recital when they entered the Vicus Patricius and reached Aulus' dwelling. A sturdy young janitor opened the door leading into the ostium or inner hall, while a captive magpie accorded them a noisy "Salve!"

As the visitors were walking from the ostium to the atrium Vinicius inquired of his companion:

"Did you notice that the porter had no chains on him?"

"Yes. This is a strange house," replied Petronius *sotto voce*. "Doubtless you have heard that Pomponia Græcina has been suspected of cultivating Oriental superstitions that are based upon the adoration of a certain Christ? Probably it was Crispinilla who did her that service, for Crispinilla cannot forgive Pomponia for having cleaved to a single husband all her life. A one-husbanded woman—why, in these days Rome could more easily produce a plate of mushrooms from Noricum!"

"You are right; it is a strange establishment. Later on I will tell you what I have seen and heard here."

Upon this they entered the atrium, and the slave who was in charge sent the nomenclator to announce the guests, while other attendants provided them with seats, and placed footstools.

Petronius, supposing that, in this house, tedium reigned supreme, had never before visited it. Consequently he gazed around him with a certain air of disappointed surprise on perceiving that the well-lighted atrium gave

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no tokens of gloom. A spray of brilliant light, falling from above, kept breaking into a thousand sparkles of light against the waters of a fountain that came spurting out of a rectangular basin. This was the impluvium, or receptacle set to catch rain-water. Around it were anemones and irises, while it was also clear that lilies were a favourite in the establishment, for they were present in red and white masses, in addition to sapphire-coloured irises of which the delicate petals seemed to have been dipped in liquid gold. From mosses and tufts of foliage there peeped forth statuettes representative of children and aquatic birds; while in a corner a stag, its corroded, verdigris-coated crest lowered to the water's edge, seemed to be engaged in drinking. The floor of the atrium was formed of mosaic work, and the walls—partly moulded in red marble, and partly covered with frescoes representing trees, fishes, birds, and griffons—charmed the eye with their display of colour. Lastly, the frames of the doorways which gave upon the adjacent apartments were inlaid with scallop-shells, or even with ivory, while around the walls of the atrium were ranged statues of Aulus' ancestors. Everywhere one was conscious of a quiet ease which, while far removed from luxury, was yet noble and sure of itself; with the result that Petronius, though accustomed to an incomparably more magnificent and elegant dwelling, could find nothing here to offend his taste. He was about to remark upon this to Vinicius, when a slave drew aside a curtain which divided the atrium from the tablinum, and Aulus Plautius himself appeared.

He was a man already in the eventide of life, but still robust, and possessed of a countenance which, though, perhaps, a trifle short and aquiline, had strongly marked features. At the moment his air was one of astonishment, and even of disquietude—due to the fact that he saw before him the unfamiliar figure of the friend, the companion, and the confidant of Nero.

Petronius was too finished a man of the world not to perceive this; but, the first salutations over, he proceeded to explain his errand with his accustomed alacrity and grace, saying that he had come to thank Plautius for the care which the latter had bestowed upon his (Petronius') nephew, and that that alone was the reason for his visit, which he had been the further emboldened to make by the fact that he and Aulus had formerly stood on terms of acquaintanceship.

"You are welcome," replied Plautius; "and as for thanking me, it is I who owe *you* a debt—though it is probable that you would never suspect the cause of it."

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And, in truth, though Petronius raised his hazel eyebrows and searched his memory, he could not divine what the cause might be.

"I have a great liking," resumed Aulus, "as well as a great respect, for Vespasian, whose life you saved on the day that he had the misfortune to fall asleep while listening to Cæsar's verses."

"Say, rather, the *happiness* to fall asleep," replied Petronius: "for that saved him from hearing them. Yet the affair, I am convinced, came near to ending badly, for Bronzebeard was set upon sending him a centurion, with the friendly advice to open one of his veins."

"And you, I understand, laughed at Cæsar?"

"No. I represented to him that if Orpheus could sing brute savages to sleep, it was no less a triumph to have caused Vespasian to slumber. Ahenobarbus *can* bear a little criticism, provided that with that little there is mixed up an ocean of flattery. Our gracious Augusta Poppæa can perform the trick in question to admiration."

"What times these are!" continued Aulus. "I have lost two incisor teeth—knocked out by a stone which a Briton hurled at my head—and have to speak with a lisp; yet the happiest moments of my life were spent in that barbarian's country."

"That is because they were your moments of victory," interposed Vinicius; whereupon Petronius, fearful lest the old soldier should be led to detail his campaigns, changed the subject by relating that in the neighbourhood of Prænestum some peasants had found the carcase of a two-headed wolf; that, during the storm of the night before last, the lightning had struck a corner-stone of the Temple of Luna—an unheard-of occurrence so late in the autumn; and that one Cotta, from whom he had had the news, had added that the priests of the temple now foretold the ruin of the city, or at least of a powerful family therein, unless the calamity were averted by abundant sacrifice.

Aulus expressed the opinion that such portents ought not to be neglected. In days when crime was rampant, who could be surprised at the gods growing angry? Propitiatory sacrifices certainly seemed to be imperative.

"Your house, Plantius," replied Petronius, "is not over-large, although a great man lives in it. Mine, on the contrary, is too large for its parsimonious owner, although it is none the less a small one. If, therefore, there is about to ensue the downfall of a building as imposing as, for example, the Domus Transitoria, is it worth your and my while to make propitiatory offerings to avert the catastrophe?"

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To this Plautius returned no reply; which reticence a little wounded Petronius, since, despite the boundless elasticity of his morals, he had never been an informer. Again he changed the subject by launching out into an eulogy of Plautius' dwelling, as well as of the good taste which reigned there.

"It is an old house," replied Plautius, "and I have made no changes in it since the day I first inherited the property."

The drapery which divided the atrium from the tablinum had now been drawn aside; which had the effect of throwing the house open from the one end to the other, and bringing it about that, through the tablinum, the further peristylum, and the adjacent apartment, the eye carried to the garden, which looked like a brilliant picture set in a dark frame. Thence came the merry laughter of a child—laughter which penetrated into the atrium.

"Ah, sir," said Petronius, "pray allow us to move within closer hearing of that frank gaiety—a gaiety which is so rare in these days!"

"With pleasure," replied Plautius, rising. "It is Lygia and my little Aulus playing at ball. But I should have conceived that your days for laughing were over?"

"All life is ridiculous, so I laugh with the rest," said Petronius. "But in this place laughter has a different sound."

"No, Petronius does not laugh much in these days," added Vinicius. "He laughs, rather, at night."

Conversing thus, the trio traversed the length of the house, until they found themselves in the garden.

Petronius glanced at Lygia as the little Aulus ran to greet Vinicius. Advancing, the latter bowed to the young girl. The ball in her hand, her black hair slightly dishevelled, her breath coming in light pants, and her cheeks blushing red, she stood motionless before him.

In a triclinium that was shaded with ivy, vine-plants, and honeysuckle there was seated also Pomponia Græcina. The guests went forward to salute her. Petronius already enjoyed her acquaintance, through having met her at the house of Autistia, daughter of Rubellius Plautius, as well as at the houses of Seneca and Pollio; nor could he help feeling a certain respectful astonishment as he saw the quiet melancholy of her face and the dignity of her every pose, gesture, and word.

Even now, as he thanked her for the kindness shown to Vinicius, he insensibly addressed her as "Domina"—a title which he would never have dreamed of using in conversation with, for instance, Calvia Crispinilla, Scribonia, Valeria, Solina, or other women of the world. These

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greetings and acknowledgments over, he expressed his regret that she was so seldom to be seen in public—that he never met her either at the Circus or at the Amphitheatre; to which she replied quietly, with her hand resting in that of her husband:

"We two are growing old, and prefer the domestic hearth."

Petronius was about to protest against this taste for seclusion, when Aulus Plautius added in his lisping accent:

"Moreover, we are more and more coming to feel strangers among folk who trick out the Roman gods in Greek names."

"The Roman gods have long been merging into mere rhetorical figures," replied Petronius carelessly: "and it is the Greeks who taught us rhetoric. For myself, I find it easier to say Hera than to say Juno." With a glance he indicated that, in the presence of Pomponia, the name of Juno came naturally to the lips.

Next he went on to protest against what she had said on the subject of old age.

"Old age comes swiftly," he said; "but more swiftly, or less swiftly, according to our mode of life. Also, there are faces which Saturn appears to forget."

Nor were Petronius' words wholly insincere, since, despite the fact that Pomponia had passed the meridian of life, she retained a rare freshness of colour. Also, through her having a small head and delicate features, even her sombre robe, coupled with her habitual stiffness and taciturnity, did not prevent her from seeming, at moments, really young.

The little Aulus, who, since Vinicius' sojourn in the house, had been great friends with the young man, now invited him to play ball; while Lygia took advantage of the child's invitation to retire into the triclinium. There, under the cover of its ivy, the leaves of which kept reflecting small specks of light upon her face, she appeared to Petronius' eye even prettier than she had done at first glance, so that she really resembled a nymph. He had not yet spoken to her, but now he rose, bowed, and quoted to her the words with which Ulysses greets Nausicaa:

"I am at thy feet, no matter whether thou be goddess or a mortal.
If thou art of the mortals who do dwell upon the earth,
Happy, thrice happy, are thy sire and thy mother;
Happy, thrice happy, are those thy brethren."

Even Pomponia was not wholly insensible to the polished courtesy of this worldling. Still less so was Lygia, who listened confused and blushing, with her eyes cast down. Then a roguish smile began to stir the corners of her lips,

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and a slight hesitation flitted across her charming features; until, quoting the rest of the passage at a breath, like a lesson learnt by heart, she replied in the words of Nausicaa:

"Stranger, methinks thou art not of lowly birth, nor yet of feeble spirit."

This said, she fled away like a frightened bird.

It was now Petronius' turn to feel astonished, for he had not expected to hear Homer issue from the mouth of the young girl whose barbaric origin had just been revealed to him by Vinicius. He glanced inquiringly at Pomponia, and surprised her smiling at the pride reflected in the face of her husband. As a matter of fact, for all his ancient Roman prejudices (which obliged him to fulminate against the Greek language and the diffusion of the same) Aulus was by no means displeased that this cultivated man of the world, this *littérateur*, should have found in his (Aulus') home some one capable of answering a Greek-speaking interlocutor in the same tongue, through the medium of a verse of Homer.

"We keep a Greek tutor to give our little son lessons," said he, turning to Petronius; "and in those lessons the maiden also participates. As yet, she is only a young wagtail, but a very charming one, and we all love her."

Through the trellis-work of ivy and honeysuckle Petronius contemplated the garden and the trio of persons playing in it. Vinicius, in plain tunic, threw the ball aloft, while Lygia, with a supple arching of the body, caught it. At first the young girl had struck Petronius as looking fragile; but, seen thus in the clear light of the garden, she might have turned into a living statue of Aurora. That rosy, diaphanous countenance, those lips made for kissing, those deep blue eyes, that forehead of alabaster whiteness, that dark hair with tints of amber and bronze, that supple form—a form so lithe, so young, so fresh as to resemble may-blossom just bursting from the bud—truly the maiden constituted a harmony of spring! And, like a lamp in which a light is burning, her rosy limbs revealed the purity of soul from which they derived their radiance.

Suddenly Petronius' mind recurred to Chrysothemis, and he smiled a bitter smile. To his mind's eye Chrysothemis, with her powdered, golden hair and blackened eyebrows, seemed extraordinarily faded, like a withered rose-leaf. Yet all Rome was envying him his possession of her!

"Vinicius has at least good taste," was his silent comment; "and my Chrysothemis dates from the taking of Troy."

To Pomponia Græcina he added:

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"I can now understand, Domina, that, with such beings as these around you, you would naturally prefer home to the gaieties of the Palatine and of the Circus."

"Yes," she replied with her eyes upon Lygia and the little Aulus.

Next the old general related what he knew of the history of the young girl, as well as what he had learnt from Atelius Hister concerning the Lygians of the misty North. The players ceased their game of ball, and seated themselves on a bench near the fishpond; but soon the youngster ran away to tease the denizens of the pond, and Vinicius continued a conversation which he had begun while walking to and fro with Lygia.

"Yes," said he in a low voice which trembled, "I had scarcely left off wearing the pretexta¹ when I was sent to join the legions in Asia, and so had no time to become acquainted with Rome or with life or with love. As a boy I attended the school of Musonius, who used to say that happiness lies in suiting one's will to the will of the gods, and that, therefore, it depends upon one's own volition. I think, however, that there is another happiness—a happiness greater, and more precious, a happiness altogether independent of our volition. That happiness only love can give us. It is a felicity which even the gods themselves have to seek for; and I who have never known love wish to follow in their footsteps, and to seek her who can confer upon me the bliss of which I am speaking."

Then he was silent, and for a moment no sound was heard but the splashing of the water as the little Aulus threw pebbles to frighten the fishes. Then Vinicius resumed in a voice even lower and more tender:

"Probably you have heard of Vespasian's son, Titus? It is said that almost from boyhood he loved Berenice passionately, and that his unfortunate devotion almost proved his death. I too could love like that, Lygia. Riches, glory, and power are so much empty smoke, are a mere nothing. A rich man can always find some one richer than himself, and, in the end, the glory of the famous man will always find itself eclipsed by some greater glory, and the powerful man will always have to yield place to a stronger power than his own. Neither Cæsar nor any of the gods can know more perfect felicity than belongs to the simple mortal who feels a beloved breast beating against his own, and imprints kisses upon lips that are dear to him. Yes, love can make us equal to the gods themselves, Lygia!"

She had listened to him as though she were listening to

¹ Youth's tunic.

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the sound of a Greek flute or lyre—to music which, as it filtered into her ears, stirred her blood, and filled her heart at once with languor, apprehension, and a sort of supernatural joy. That of which he spoke had long been dormant within her, but had never until now attained articulation.

Upon the statuesque cypress-trees there was descending a red light in which the whole atmosphere seemed to be bathed. Lygia raised her eyes to those of Vinicius as though awaking from a dream; and suddenly, as he bent towards her with a prayer in his glance, he became, to her eyes, handsomer than any statue of a man or of a god which she had seen on the facade of a temple. Gently he laid his hand upon her wrist, and asked her:

"Can you not guess why I am speaking to you thus?"

"No," she whispered, but so low that Vinicius scarcely heard her. He did not believe what she said. Laying a firmer grasp upon her wrist, he would have clasped her to his heart had not the elder Aulus suddenly appeared on the myrtle-bordered pathway, and said as he approached them:

"The sun is setting. Beware of the evening coolness. Also, do not trifle with Libitina."

"I have on my toga," replied Vinicius, "and feel not, therefore, the cold."

"Only half the sun's disc is now to be seen suspended over the Janiculum," pursued the old warrior. "Remember that this is not like the gentle climate of Sicily, where at eventide the people assemble in the squares to sing choruses to Phoebus as he goes to rest."

Then he went on to descant upon the subject of Sicily, where he owned a large agricultural estate, and often dreamed of ending his days. "After many winters have whitened one's head," he added, "one feels that one has had enough of hoar frost. The leaves have not fallen from the trees, and a kindly sky still smiles upon Rome; yet when the vines have turned to yellow, and snow has covered the Alban Hills, and the gods are sending forth a cruel wind upon the Campania, who would not remove his abode to a more peaceful retreat?"

"You think, then, of leaving Rome, Plautius?" said Vinicius anxiously.

"Yes; for a long time I have had that intention," replied Aulus. "Down in the south life is quieter and safer." Again he fell to extolling his orchards, his flocks, his villa hidden among verdure, and the thyme-covered hills, with their droning swarms of bees. To this bucolic note Vicinius turned a deaf ear, for he was dreaming, rather, how to win Lygia. From time to time, also, he glanced at Petronius.

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The latter, seated beside Pomponia, was drinking in the spectacle of the setting sun, of the garden, and of the human figures near the fishpond. Against the dark background of myrtles their garments looked golden in the light of the brilliant orb; while, on the western horizon, purple and violet hues were turning to opal. Presently the zenith glowed lilac, the black, silhouetted cypress-trees grew still darker, and the peace of evening finally enveloped the trees and the garden in folds of calm.

Petronius could not but marvel at the stillness. On the faces of Pomponia and the aged Aulus, as well as on those of their little son and Lygia, there was something which he had never seen on the faces which filled his nights. He felt that a tenderly radiant peace—a peace emanating from their daily life—surrounded the inmates of this villa, and that there could exist a beauty and a charm which he, who was for ever seeking both, had never yet found. This impression craved for communication to another; wherefore he remarked to Pomponia:

"How different your world is to that of our lord Nero!"

Pomponia raised her delicate face to the falling twilight, and said simply:

"Not Nero, but God, rules the world."

There ensued a silence. On the pathway there could be heard the footsteps of Vinicius, the old general, Lygia, and little Aulus. Just before the group reached the spot Petronius asked again:

"You believe, then, in the gods, do you, Pomponia?"

"I believe," she replied, "in a God who is both One, Just, and All-Powerful."

III

"SHE believes in a God who is both one, just, and all-powerful," repeated Petronius when again he found himself in the litter with Vinicius. "If her God is *really* all-powerful, it means that he is master of life and of death; and if he is *really* just, it means that it is he who sends death into the world. That being so, why does Pomponia wear mourning garments for Julia? For, in lamenting Julia, she is blaming her God. This reasoning must be submitted to our good monkey, Bronzebeard. As for women in general, I am convinced that each of them possesses at least three or four souls, but not a soul that is capable of reasoning. Pomponia would do well to meditate with Seneca or Cornutus upon what constitutes their grand Logos. Let them invoke the shades of Xenophon, Par-

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menides, Zeno, and Plato, who must be as weary in the country of the Cimmerians¹ as chaffinches in a cage. However, it is not of that that I wished to speak to her and Plautius. By the sacred belly of the Egyptian Isis, if I had explained the *real* reason why we had come, I have little doubt that their virtue would have cried out like a brazen buckler struck with a club! No, I dared not do it. To think of it, Vinicius! I dared not do it! Peacocks are beautiful birds, but their cry is over-strident; so *I* was afraid of uttering my cry. However, let me congratulate you on your choice. She is a true 'Aurora finger-tipped with red.' And do you know what else she reminds me of? Of spring. By this I do not mean our spring of Italy, where here and there an apple-tree covers itself over with blossom, whilst the olive-trees remain grey dust, but the spring which I used to see in Helvetia—a spring young, fresh, and brilliantly green. By pale Selene, I can understand you, Marcus! Yet remember that she whom you adore is a perfect Diana, and that Aulus and Pomponia would tear you in pieces as readily as his hounds did Actæon."

For a moment Vinicius sat silent—his head bent down. Then he said:

"Always I have wanted her; and now I am wanting her more than ever. Even when I pressed her hand a burst of flame seemed to envelop me! Yes, she *must* be mine. If I were Zeus, I should enfold her in a cloud, as was done with Io, or fall upon her in a shower of golden rain, as he fell upon Danaïs. Also, I would kiss her lips until I hurt her. I would actually make her cry out in my embrace! Then I would kill Aulus and Pomponia, and, snatching her up in my arms, bear her off to my own dwelling. To-night I shall not sleep a wink. I am going to have my slaves whipped in order that I may listen to their groans."

"Calm yourself," said Petronius. "You have the instincts of a carpenter of the Suburra."

"No matter; I *must* have her, and have come to ask your advice about it. But if you have none to give, let me go and seek it elsewhere. Aulus looks upon Lygia as his daughter. Why, therefore, should *I* look upon her as a slave? If there be no other way, let her come and smear my door with wolf's fat, and bind it with thread, and take her seat by my hearth as my wife."

"Calm yourself, frenzied offspring of consuls," repeated Petronius. "If we bring barbarians hither, to lead them behind our chariots with ropes round their necks, it is not

¹ Hades, or the infernal regions.

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for the purpose of marrying their daughters. Do not push matters too far. First exhaust every simple and honourable means. Give me and yourself time to think the matter over. I used to believe Chrysothemis a similar daughter of Jupiter: yet I did not marry her. Nor did Nero marry Acte, although she is reputed to be a daughter of King Attalus. No; calm yourself! Remember that if Lygia should choose to desert the Auluses for your sake, they will have not a grain of right to detain her. Moreover, you are not the only one who has been set on fire. In her too Eros has kindled a flame. I can see that clearly, and am to be trusted in such matters. Be patient. For everything there is a means. To-day, however, I have had enough of thinking, and am tired. To-morrow, I will consider your affairs again, for Petronius would not be Petronius if he could not light upon some scheme."

"I thank you. May Fortuna amply repay you with gifts!"

"Yes; but you must be patient."

"Whither would you be carried now?"

"To see Chrysothemis."

"Ah, you are happy, for you possess what you desire."

"I? Do you know why it is that Chrysothemis still amuses me? It is because she is deceiving me with my own freedman, the lute-player Theocles, and thinks that I do not know of it. Once upon a time I used to love her; but now the only pleasure that I derive from her company lies in her falsehoods and her folly. Come with me, will you? If she pays you court, and, for your edification, traces letters upon the table with a finger that she has dipped in wine, know that I shall not be jealous."

Accordingly the litter was ordered to proceed to Chrysothemis' house. In the vestibule, however, Petronius laid his hand upon Vinicius' shoulder, and said:

"Wait a moment. I think I have devised a scheme."

"May the gods reward you!"

"Yes; and I believe it to be a scheme which cannot fail. Do you know one thing, Marcus?"

"I am listening."

"It is that in a few days the divine Lygia will be eating the grain of Demeter in your abode."

"You are greater than Cæsar himself!" cried Vinicius

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IV

IN very truth Petronius kept his promise, for on the morrow of his halt at Chrysothemis' dwelling he spent the whole day in sleep, but, towards evening, had himself carried to the Palatine, and held an intimate conference with Nero—the result being that on the following day there appeared before Plautius' dwelling a centurion, heading a squad of prætorian guards.

During the present period of uncertainty and terror emissaries of this kind were only too frequently the messengers of death. No sooner, therefore, had the centurion rapped at the door, and the steward of the atrium announced the presence of the soldiers, than panic seized upon the entire household, and the family flocked round the general under the belief that it was he in particular who was menaced. Throwing her arms around her husband's neck, Pomponia clung to him, and with her livid lips murmured mysterious words, while Lygia, white as a sheet, kissed and kissed his hands, and even the little Aulus fastened on to his toga. Likewise from every portion of the house there came swarms of slaves of both sexes, until everywhere there could be heard exclamations of "Alas, alas, what a calamity!" Women sobbed, and some even tore their faces or threw their garments over their heads.

Only the old warrior, accustomed to death, remained passive—his short, aquiline face looking as though it were carved of stone. After quieting the babel, and bidding the servants disperse, he said:

"Enough, Pomponia! Even if my end is come, we shall still have time to bid farewell to one another."

He put her gently from him; but she only cried out the more, "Grant, O Lord, that his fate may be mine also!" and then, falling upon her knees, surrendered herself to prayer.

Aulus passed into the atrium, where the centurion stood awaiting him. The centurion in question was the aged Caius Hasta, who had been Plautius' subordinate during the wars in Britain.

"Hail, sir!" said the emissary. "I bring you, from Cæsar, both an order and a greeting. Here are the tablets and seal to prove that it is in his name that I have come."

"Of Cæsar's greeting I am sensible, and to his order I will render due obedience. What, then, is your message, Hasta?"

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"Aulus Plautius," replied the centurion, "it has come to Cæsar's knowledge that in your house there is abiding the daughter of the King of the Lygians—a maiden whom that monarch dispatched to Rome as a hostage. The divine Nero thanks you, O General, for according the maiden hospitality; but, since he is unwilling any longer to impose upon you that obligation, and also recognises that, as a hostage, she ought to be placed under the protection of Cæsar himself and of the Senate, he now bids you hand her over into his keeping."

Aulus was too much a soldier, as well as too strong-willed, to meet a command of this sort with any words of protest or of anger. Yet for a second or two a spasm of grief and resentment wrinkled his brows. Once upon a time his frown had made the legions of Britain tremble; and even at this moment Hasta's face went white with fear. Aulus then scrutinised the tablets and the seal, and raising his eyes to the old centurion, said calmly:

"Wait in the atrium, Hasta. The hostage shall be sent to you."

With that he passed through the house until he had reached the apartment in which Pomponia Græcina, Lygia, and the little Aulus had taken refuge.

"Neither death nor banishment to distant isles awaits any one here," he said. "Yet Cæsar's messenger has come as a harbinger of woe, for the message concerns *you*, Lygia."

"Lygia?" cried Pomponia.

"Yes."

Then to the young girl Plautius continued:

"Lygia, you have been brought up in our house, and Pomponia and I have come to love you as though you were our own daughter. Yet it is to Cæsar that your guardianship belongs, and he has now sent to recall you."

"Aulus," cried Pomponia, "death itself would be better for her."

But Lygia rushed into her arms, exclaiming, "My mother, my mother!" while for the second time Aulus' face expressed grief and resentment.

"If only I had been alone in the world!" he said darkly. "Then would I never have yielded her alive, and this very day my kinsfolk might have repaired with offerings to the temple of Jupiter Liberator. . . . Nay, I myself will go to Cæsar, and entreat him to reconsider his decision. Will he listen to me? I know not. In the meanwhile farewell, Lygia, and rest assured that we shall always bless the day when you came to sit by our hearth. Farewell, you who are our joy and the light of our eyes."

Then he returned quickly to the atrium, lest he should

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be overcome with an emotion unworthy of a Roman and of a general.

Meanwhile Pomponia conducted Lygia to her cubiculum, and there addressed to her certain words which sounded strangely in that house, where, constant in his attention to the lararium, Aulus Plautius offered sacrifices to domestic gods.

"Your time of trial is arrived," said Pomponia. "Long ago Virginius stabbed his daughter to the heart to save her from Appius, while Lucretia surrendered, as the price of her dishonour, her life. Cæsar's palace is a house of ill-fame; but though the holier law under which we both live forbids us to take our lives, it permits us—nay, it enjoins us—to defend ourselves from insult, even though our lives be the price we pay. He or she who issues uncorrupted from the pit of corruption earns the greater merit thereby; and the world *is* such a pit of corruption. Fortunately we live only for the twinkling of an eye before we rise again from the tomb."

Then she opened to Lygia her heart and its wounds. Her beloved Aulus, she said, retained the mote in his eye, since the source of light had not yet reached him; nor was she able even to rear her little son in the truth. Perhaps it would always be so; with the result that one day there would come a separation infinitely more grievous and more terrible than the momentary separation which she and Lygia were about to endure. Without her husband and her son she could conceive of no happiness on earth. Already she had passed many a night in imploring the divine pity and grace, but she presented her sufferings in sure hope and an assured expectancy. Even now that a new blow had struck her, that the order of a murderer was taking from her one of her beloved ones, she still had faith in a strength that was greater than Nero's, in a compassion that was more potent even than his villainy.

With that Pomponia clasped the young girl to her breast. Lygia fell upon her knees, and, burying her face in the folds of Pomponia's peplum, kept silence for a while. When, however, she arose that face had grown calmer.

"How it hurts me to leave you, my mother!" she said. "How it hurts me also to leave my father and my brother! But I know that resistance would be of no avail, and would but prove your undoing. When I have entered Cæsar's palace, at least I shall never forget your words."

Then she took leave of the little Aulus, of the old Greek who had been their tutor, of the nurse who had tended her, and of the rest of the slaves. One of the latter—a

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huge, brawny Lygian named Ursus, who had reached the camp of the Romans at the same time as Lygia and her mother—fell at Pomponia's feet, saying:

"O Domina, suffer me to follow my mistress, that I may serve her and watch over her in the house of Cæsar."

"As you say, you are Lygia's servant and not our own; yet would they allow you to enter Cæsar's portals? How, also, would you contrive to watch over her?"

"I know not. I only know that iron will break in my hand like wood."

Aulus Plautius did not oppose Ursus' wish. In fact, he declared that Lygia's entire suite ought to accompany her under the protection of the Emperor. In addition to Ursus, Pomponia had attached to Lygia's person the old nurse, a couple of skilled Cypriot coiffeuses, and two young German bath-attendants—the choice falling exclusively upon persons who were *au fait* with the new doctrine, which Ursus also had practised for several years.

In addition, Pomponia wrote a few words to recommend Lygia to the care of one of Nero's freedwomen, named Acte. True, Pomponia had never met Acte at any gathering of the faithful, but the freedwoman was known to be one who never refused her services to Christians, and eagerly read the Epistles of Paul of Tarsus.

The letter to Acte Hasta took it upon himself personally to deliver; nor did he make any difficulty about transferring the whole of Lygia's entourage to the palace. Rather, he expressed astonishment that a king's daughter should head so small a retinue. Then for the last time Aulus laid his hands upon the young girl's head; after which the soldiers, on being summoned by the cries of the little Aulus, who was for defending his sister and actually threatening the centurion with his puny fists, led Lygia away to Cæsar's dwelling.

This done, the old warrior ordered his litter to be got ready, and, while waiting for it, closeted himself with Pomponia in the pinacotheca.

"Listen to me, Pomponia," he said. "I am about to go to Cæsar, vain though I anticipate my visit to prove. Also, despite the fact that Seneca's advice no longer weighs much with Nero, I intend to appeal to Seneca, even though in these days court influence has passed, rather, to Sophonius, to Tigellinus, to Petronius, and to Vatinius. Probably Cæsar has never so much as heard of the Lygians, and his sending for Lygia must mean that he has been instigated to the act by some one. Who that some one is I can guess."

"Petronius?"

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"Yes, Petronius. It is a fitting retribution upon us for having opened our doors to persons who are destitute of honour. Cursed also be the moment when Vinicius first passed our threshold! He it is who brought Petronius to this house. And woe betide Lygia, for these men want her, not as a hostage, but as a concubine. Until to-day I have always paid the gods honour; but from this moment onwards I shall believe that there are no gods—that there exists but the foul, the mad, the monstrous Nero."

"Aulus," said Pomponia, "in the sight of *God* Nero is no more than a handful of vile earth."

Mastering the wrath that still clouded his ideas, Plautius said gently (for he feared to offend Pomponia):

"It is not for Cæsar's benefit that Petronius has deprived us of Lygia, but for his own, or for Vinicius'. To-day I intend to make certain of this."

A moment later the litter was on its way to the Palatine, while Pomponia, on finding herself alone, went to look for the little Aulus, who was still bewailing his sister, and threatening Cæsar.

V

PLAUTIUS was right in thinking that he would not be admitted to Cæsar's presence. The gist of the answer given him was that Cæsar was busy singing with the lute-player Terpnos, as also that Cæsar never received persons who had not been sent for.

On the other hand, Seneca, though suffering from fever, received the old general.

"There is only one service that I can render you, good Plautius," said he with a bitter smile: "and that is, never to let Cæsar perceive that I sympathise with your distress."

Also, he advised Plautius to leave Tigellinus, Vatinius, and Vitellius alone. Perhaps money would be able to effect something with them, or perhaps they would be glad to injure Petronius, whose influence they were engaged in undermining; but more probable was it that they would go and report to Cæsar how much store he (Plautius) set upon Lygia, and then the monarch would guard her the more jealously.

"You have remained silent too long, Plautius," said Seneca. "For several years past you have not spoken; and Cæsar does not like those who open not their mouths. How could you dare not to go into raptures over his beauty, his virtue, his singing, his oratory, his policy, and his

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verses? How could you dare not to praise the murder of Britannicus, or to refrain from eulogising Nero as a matricide, or to withhold your congratulations when he strangled Octavia?"

Taking a goblet from his girdle, the speaker filled it with water from the impluvium, refreshed his burning lips with the liquid, and then resumed:

"Yet Nero has a heart that can remember things. He loves you because you have rendered Rome some splendid service, and he loves myself because I tutored him during his youth. For the latter reason I feel sure that this water has not been poisoned, and that I can drink it without fear. About wine I should *not* feel so sure; wherefore if at any time you should be thirsty, come and drink boldly of this fountain, since our aqueducts lead directly from the Alban Hills, and, to poison them, one would need to poison all the fountains in Rome. You see, therefore, that a man can still grow old in peace. True, I am ill, but it is my mind, rather, that is ailing."

This was true enough. Seneca lacked the strength of mind which was possessed by (for instance) Cornutus and Thrascas. His life was one long process of making excuses for crimes committed. Yet none knew better than he that a disciple of Zeno of Citium ought to have followed another road; and the thought tortured him worse than did the fear of death.

These bitter reflections the general interrupted.

"My good Annæus," he said, "I am not ignorant of the fact that Cæsar has made you some recompense for the care with which you surrounded his youthful years; but the man who has taken from us our Lygia is Petronius. Tell me, therefore, how to proceed; tell me to what influences this man might hearken. In short, seek to move him with all the eloquence with which, as I know, your old friendship for myself will inspire you."

"He and I," replied Seneca, "belong to opposite camps. How to proceed I know not, for no one has any influence at all over him. Possibly Petronius is not quite so worthless as the other rascals with whom Nero surrounds himself: yet to seek to convince him of sin would be a waste of time, seeing that he cannot distinguish between good and evil. Yet only prove to him that his conduct is *anti-æsthetical*, and he *will* feel ashamed. Accordingly, when I next see him I shall say to him, 'Your proceedings are worthy of a freedman;' and if that does not succeed, nothing will."

"I thank you," replied the general.

Repairing, next, to Vinicius' mansion, Plautius found its owner engaged in practising swordsmanship with his maitre-

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d'armes. As soon as they were alone Aulus' wrath vented itself in a torrent of curses and reproaches. Yet the news of the outrage caused Vinicius' countenance to turn so deadly pale that all suspicion as to the young man's complicity at once fled Plautius' mind. Indeed, Vinicius' forehead exuded great drops of sweat, his eyes flashed, and his lips stammered a series of incoherent questions. Jealousy and rage had overthrown his balance completely, for he imagined that, once Lygia had crossed Cæsar's threshold, she would be lost to him for ever. Yet as soon as ever Aulus uttered Petronius' name a suspicion burst, like a flash of light, upon the young soldier's mind—a suspicion that Petronius was making a fool of him, and that he wished to curry fresh favour with Cæsar by offering him the girl as though she had been his own.

"General," he said, in a broken voice (violence was hereditary in the family of Vinicius), "you must know that, even if Petronius stood to me in place of a father, he should account to me for this outrage. Pray, therefore, return home, and await me there. Neither Petronius nor Cæsar shall have her. Rather than that, I will kill both myself and her."

And he set out for Petronius' dwelling, while Aulus returned home disheartened, although he did what he could to console Pomponia. Then the old couple sat down to await any news that might come from Vinicius. Hour after hour passed, and evening had fallen, when a knock resounded at the outer door, and a slave entered bearing a letter for Aulus.

Thus ran the letter:

"Marcus Vinicius to Aulus Plautius. Hail! What has been done has been done by the will of Cæsar; to whom you must bow, as do Petronius and myself."

VI

To go back a little—Vinicius found Petronius at home, and, resisting the porter's efforts to stop him, burst, first into the atrium, and then into the bibliothecum or library. Petronius was engaged in writing, but Vinicius snatched the pen from his hand, broke it in half, and driving his knuckles into his uncle's arm, asked hoarsely:

"What have you done with her? Where is she?"

Petronius, the effeminate Petronius, seized the hand which the young athlete had laid upon his arm, and then the other one in the same way; and said as he held them in one of his own hands, as in a vice:

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"You see, it is only during the morning hours that I am weak: by eventide I have recovered my strength again. Try to free your hands. A weaver must have taught you your gymnastics, and a blacksmith your manners."

That said, he loosed Vinicius' hands. The young man remained standing before him—furious, but abashed.

"Certainly you have a hand of steel," he said; "but by the gods of the infernal regions do I swear that, if you have played me false, I will plunge a dagger into your throat, even in the very presence of Cæsar."

"Let us talk quietly," replied Petronius. "It is for *your* fault that I am suffering; and if I still were capable of feeling surprise at human ingratitude, I should be feeling surprised at yours."

"Where is Lygia?"

"In a brothel—that is to say, in Nero's palace."

"Petronius!"

"Be calm, and seat yourself. I asked of Cæsar two things, both of which he promised to grant me—namely, that he would remove Lygia from Plautius' abode, and that thereafter he would send her to you. Are you quite sure that you have not a dagger in the folds of your toga—that you are not going to stab me? Well, if so, I should advise you to wait a few days longer: otherwise you might be cast into prison, and Lygia be forced to wait for you in vain."

There ensued a silence. Vinicius looked at Petronius with a stupefied air. Presently he said:

"Pardon me. You see, I love her, and my passion renders me almost beside myself."

"See now, Marcus. This is what I said to Cæsar the day before last: 'My nephew Vinicius is so enamoured of a young girl whom the Auluses have adopted that his sighs have converted his house into a perfect vapour bath. You, Cæsar—you and I, who love only true beauty—would not give a thousand sesterces for the maiden, but this youth is a fool who has always been as stupid as a tripod.'"

"Petronius!"

"If you cannot understand that what I said was designed to save Lygia I shall be forced to believe that what I said was true. However, I succeeded in convincing Bronze-beard that an æsthete like himself could not possibly mistake such a girl for a beauty: consequently Nero, who dare see nothing except through my eyes, will not covet her. For the moment it was necessary to get on the leeward side of that monkey, and to put him on a leash. Then I continued carelessly: 'Take Lygia, and send her to Vinicius. You have the right to do so, for she is a hostage, while the same act will put you on a correct footing with

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Aulus.' To this Cæsar consented; and he had the less reason for declining to do so in that I had given him an opportunity of hurting a brave man. You, therefore, are to be the official guardian of this hostage. The Lygian treasure is to be put into *your* hands, and you are not only to refrain from squandering the treasure, but you are also to increase it. Happy mortal!"

"Is this true? Are you sure that she stands in no danger in Cæsar's abode?"

"If she had been going to remain there permanently, Poppæa would have mentioned the fact to Locusta; but for a few days, at all events, there will be nothing to fear. Ten thousand persons dwell in Cæsar's palace. Possibly he will not even get to know of her presence. A centurion has just called with the news that she has been taken thither, and handed over to the care of Acte. Acte is a good soul, and that is why I caused her to be put in charge of the maiden. Evidently Pomponia Græcina is of the same opinion, since she has sent Acte a letter. To-morrow there is to be a banquet at the palace, and I have had a place reserved for you beside Lygia."

"Caius, pardon my late outburst. I thought you had abducted her for your own benefit, or for Cæsar's."

"The outburst I *will* pardon you; but those vulgar gestures, that rude shouting, that tone as of a mora-gambler, I do not like. Tigellinus, not I, is the man to play jackal to Cæsar. If I had wanted the girl I should have said to you openly: 'Vinicius, I am about to abduct Lygia, and to keep her until I have grown tired of her.'"

With that he looked Vinicius straight in the face with, in his eyes, a cold, insolent expression which still further increased the younger man's confusion.

"Yes, I am at fault," agreed the latter. "You are a man of generosity, and I thank you. Yet permit me to ask yet another question. Why did you not have Lygia sent to me direct?"

"Because Cæsar wishes to save appearances. Otherwise the adventure would be noised all over Rome, and talked about everywhere. Since we are recovering Lygia merely in her capacity of a hostage, she can stay in Cæsar's palace until the stir has died away; after which she will be quietly forwarded to your own house. Bronzebeard is, as you know, a timid sort of cur. Though well aware that his power is unlimited, he always seeks an excuse for his acts. Are you sufficiently calm to indulge in a little philosophising? I have often asked myself whether, if crime were as powerful as is Cæsar, and as sure of impunity as is he, it would be so difficult to don the mask of justice,

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of right, and of virtue. In my opinion to kill one's brother, one's mother, or one's wife is worthy of an Asiatic kinglet rather than of a Roman emperor; yet if I *had* to do such a deed, at least I should not go to the pains of seeking written justification from the Senate, as Nero has more than once done. Yes, he is always for appearances, for the reason that he is a coward. Again, though Tiberius was a different type from Nero, even *he* sought to justify his every outrage. Why is it that crime pays such extraordinary homage to virtue? My own opinion about it is that crime is ugly, while virtue is beautiful. Consequently, the true aesthete is also a man of rectitude. For instance, I myself am a man of rectitude, and this very day intend to offer libations to the shades of Protagoras, of Prodicus, and of Gorgias. Sophists too have their uses. . . . But, to continue, I ravished Lygia from Aulus merely in order to hand her over to you. Lysippus would have made a charming group of such a pair. Moreover, since you are both of you fair to look upon, my action also becomes beautiful, and for that very reason could never be base. Open your eyes to their widest, Marcus, for before you there sits Virtue incarnated in the person of Petronius."

Vinicius was a man who took a greater interest in realities than in theories; wherefore he replied:

"To-morrow I intend to see Lygia, and thereafter to keep her in my house for ever, until I die."

"Yes, you *shall* have Lygia, and I will get the better of Aulus. Let him devote me to the infernal gods if he likes. If only he would take a lesson or two in articulation!"

"Aulus has been to see me, and I promised to send him news of Lygia."

"Then write to him that the will of the 'divine' Cæsar is the supreme law, and that your firstborn son shall be called Aulus. We ought to afford the old man *some* consolation. Shall I ask Bronzebeard to invite him to to-morrow's festival? Aulus could then see you seated on a triclinium by Lygia's side."

"No, no!" said Vinicius, "I should feel uneasy, especially in the presence of Pomponia;" after which he seated himself and wrote the letter which was to deprive the old general of his last remaining hope.

VII

ONCE upon a time the highest heads in the land had bowed before Acte, then mistress of Nero. Also, she had earned the gratitude of many, and had made foes of none. Even

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Octavia had never really hated her, while at the present time she was looked upon as too insignificant to merit envy, even though she still loved Nero with a sort of mournful, despondent affection—an affection that was devoid of hope, and nourished on the remembrance of hours which had for ever vanished. Poppæa too had refrained from having her dismissed from the palace, and from time to time Nero would invite Acte to his table, on the principle which had formerly permitted Pallas and Narcissus—persons who, like Acte herself, were persons who had been accorded their freedom—to assist at Claudius' festivals, where, as powerful ministers, they occupied places of honour. Moreover, Acte's beauty was an ornament to the imperial board.

For the rest, Cæsar had long had no scruples as to whom he invited to these feasts. Senators sat at his table (principally those who were willing also to be jesters); old and young patricians who were thirsting for pleasure, luxury, and vice; women who bore great names, yet who, when eventide arrived, donned grotesque red wigs in order to seek adventures in the badly lighted streets; and pontiffs who, in their cups, railed against the gods. Also there would be present a whole rabble of singers, actors, musicians, and male and female dancers; of poets who, while reciting their effusions, thought only of the sesterces with which their laudations of Cæsar's poetry would be rewarded; of hungry philosophers who followed the dishes with gluttonous eyes; of famous charioteers, conjurors, magicians, relaters of anecdotes, buffoons, and beggars upon whom fashion or stupidity had conferred an ephemeral notoriety, yet among whom there were not wanting persons who concealed under long earrings a pair of pierced ears—the mark of former slavery.

Of these guests the more noteworthy sat at the great table itself, while the lesser fry helped to divert their fellow-guests until such time as the staff of servants should deliver over what was left of the meat and drink to their gluttonous maws. This latter class of invited guests was recruited by Tigellinus, Vatinius, and Vitellius, who more than once had to go to the pains of fitting out the invited with trappings more worthy of an imperial banquet. Cæsar loved such company as this. The luxury of the court covered everything with splendour.

That day Lygia also was to be present at the feast. Her state of perturbation was extreme, for she was afraid of Cæsar, of men in general, of the palace, of its tumult, and of the festivals—the ignominious character of which she had learnt from conversations with Aulus and Pomponia

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and their friends. Yet, though still very young, she was also no hoyden, and in those troublous times a knowledge of evil early came to the minds of children.

Thus she knew that in that palace her ruin was being sought; yet in her soul, which was devoted to a lofty doctrine, she registered a vow never to be overcome. That vow she took to her adopted mother, to herself, and to the Divine Master whom she not only worshipped, but whom she wholeheartedly loved for the gentleness of His teaching, the bitterness of His death, and the glory of His resurrection.

Aulus and Pomponia were no longer responsible for any act of hers; wherefore she asked herself whether it would be worth while to resist Cæsar's will by declining to appear at the banquet. In her there was dawning a desire to prove her courage by exposing her person to punishment and to death. Had not her Divine Master already set her the example? Had not Pomponia said that the most ardent adherents of the Faith longed for such a trial, and continually sought it in their prayers?

Lygia had felt a similar desire while residing under Aulus' roof. There she had seen herself a martyr—a martyr with bleeding hands and feet, and as white as the snow, and beautiful with a supernatural beauty as she soared heavenwards in the arms of angels.

Of course, there entered into these speculations a great deal of childish daydreaming—yet also a certain complacency which Pomponia had vainly attempted to repress. Now that resistance might provoke some terrible punishment, and the tortures hitherto conceived only in visions might soon become translated into realities, there became added to these beautiful visions and this egotistic complacency a sort of dreadful curiosity—a curiosity to know *how* she would be punished, exactly *what* species of penalty would be invented for her.

Thus her soul was in a state of irresolution; but Acte, to whom she confided her doubts, stared at her in amazement. To think of crossing the will of Cæsar, and, on the very first day, exposing oneself to his fury! Why, thus to act, one must be a child which knows not the import of what it is doing! From what Lygia had said (continued Acte) it seemed that, properly speaking, she was not a hostage at all, but a young girl who had been forgotten of her countrymen, and stood unprotected by the law of nations. And in any case Cæsar was strong enough to permit himself, in a moment of anger, to trample under foot all the laws in the world. Since it had pleased Cæsar to take her, he could henceforth dispose of her. She was

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merely the plaything of his will—above which there stood nothing in the whole universe.

"Yes," went on Acte, "I too have read the Epistles of Paul, and know that above the world there dwells God, as well as the Son of God who rose again from the dead. But *in* the world there is only Cæsar. Do not forget that, Lygia. I also know that your doctrine forbids you to be what I myself have been, and that, as between death and dishonour, you Christians, like the Stoics of whom Epictetus used to speak to me, are bound to choose death; but are you *sure* that it would be death, and not an added measure of dishonour? Are you unaware that, by Tiberius' order, the law which forbade a virgin to be put to death was observed, in the case of a daughter of Sejanus, by having her violated (she was then little more than a child) just before her execution? Lygia, Lygia, do not anger Cæsar. If ever the decisive moment shall come when you are forced to choose between death and dishonour, you must, of course, act as your faith has taught you; but do not *provoke* your ruin—do not anger, for a purely futile reason, an earthly god who is also a god of blood."

Her face a trifle marred by a squint, Acte's exquisite features peered closely into Lygia's, as though the better to mark the effect of what had been said. Lygia threw her arms around Acte's neck.

"How good you are!" she cried.

"It may be that, though my happiness in life is gone, I am *not* altogether wicked."

Then Acte started to pace the room—saying to herself despairingly as she did so:

"No, he also was never really wicked. He believed himself to be good, and he tried to be good. I say this who know him better than any one else can do. The change came later—when he had ceased to love. Others than I have brought him to this pitch—yes, others and Poppæa."

Tears bedewed her eyelashes as she spoke.

"Then do you regret him, Acte?"

"*I* regret him?" she re-echoed dully. Again she fell to pacing the room with her hands clenched and a look of sorrow on her face.

"*Do* you still love him?" again asked Lygia timidly.

"Yes, I love him. No one loves him but I."

When her face had recovered its usual expression she resumed:

"Let us talk, rather, of yourself, Lygia. It would be folly to oppose Cæsar's will. Besides, your fears are groundless, for I know the palace well, and have no reason to suppose that any peril is threatening you so far as he is

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concerned. If he had abducted you for his own benefit he would not have had you brought to the Palatine at all. The mistress of everything here is Poppæa; and, now that she has presented Nero with a daughter, he is more than ever under her influence. No; though he has given orders that you shall be present at the banquet, he has not yet seen you, nor has he asked any one about you. Consequently, he has no settled plans in the matter. Petronius, however, has begged me to take you under my protection; and since Pomponia also has written to me to that effect, it is probable that the pair are acting in concert. Who knows whether, if Petronius should persuade him, Nero will not send you home again? I greatly doubt if his affection for Petronius is unlimited; but, alas, he seldom dares stand upon his own feet."

"Ah!" exclaimed Lygia. "Petronius came to our house before I was removed from it, and my mother feels certain that what has been done has been done at his instigation."

"It may be that, at some supper or another, Petronius merely mentioned, in Nero's hearing, that at Aulus' house he had seen the hostage of the Lygians; whereupon Nero, always jealous for his prerogatives, had you taken away for the sole reason that hostages belong to Cæsar. Besides, he loves neither Aulus nor Pomponia. No, I do not think Petronius would have used such a method if he had wished to abduct you. He may be no better than the rest of Cæsar's retinue, but at least he is different. Perhaps, too, you will be able to find another than Petronius to intercede for you? Have you never met any of Cæsar's intimates at Aulus' house?"

"Yes; I have met Vespasian and Titus."

"But he does not like them."

"And Seneca."

"Should Seneca offer advice, that alone would be sufficient to make Cæsar not act upon it."

Then Lygia's clear features blushed a deeper tinge.

"I have also met—Vinicius," she murmured.

"I do not know him."

"He is a relative of Petronius', and has recently returned from Armenia."

"Does Nero look upon him with a favourable eye?"

"Upon Vinicius? Yes, every one likes him."

"And would *he* intercede for you?"

"Yes."

Acte smiled tenderly.

"Then you will see him at the banquet," she said. "You must not fail to be there. If ever you wish to regain Aulus' house you must take this opportunity of beseeching

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Petronius and Vinicius to intervene on your behalf. Were they here, both of them would tell you the same as I do—namely, that any attempt at resistance would be folly. Of course, Cæsar *might* not perceive your absence from the banquet; but, *should* he perceive it, and the thought enter his head that you had had the audacity to oppose his will, there would be no possible chance for you. Come, Lygia! Do you hear that din of voices in the palace? Already the sun is setting below the horizon, and the guests are about to arrive."

"You are right, Acte," replied Lygia. "I will follow your advice."

Probably she herself could not have said precisely whether the desire to see Petronius and Vinicius weighed with her less than a purely feminine curiosity to witness, for once in her life, a festival of the kind about to be held—a curiosity to get a glimpse of Cæsar, of his court, of Poppæa and the other beauties, and of the splendour whereof she had heard so many tales.

Acte conducted her to her own private unctorium—there to be rubbed with aromatic powders and dressed for the banquet. Also, though Cæsar's palace did not lack female slaves, and Acte had a staff of such domestics at her personal disposal, she decided, out of sympathy for the diffident maiden, to robe her with her own hands. Soon it became evident that, despite her gravity of demeanour and her assiduous reading of the Epistles of Paul, Acte had not lost a spice of the old Hellenic spirit to which bodily comeliness always made the strongest of all appeals; for no sooner had she undressed Lygia than she uttered a cry of admiration at the sight of the maiden's limbs—limbs at once full and graceful, and looking as though they had been carved out of mother-of-pearl and roses.

"Lygia," she exclaimed, "you are a hundred times more beautiful even than Poppæa!"

Brought up in the establishment of the stern Pomponia, where reticence was observed even among the women of the household, the young girl blushed deeply as she stood as symmetrical as a symphony and as rosy-pink as modesty itself. With knees pressed together, and her hands uplifted to her throat, she remained glancing downward under eyelashes that were worthy of a queen.

Then she raised her arms abruptly, and loosed the pins with which her hair was bound. The next moment she had removed them entirely, and covered herself as with an undulating mantle.

Acte gently touched the dark tresses.

"Ah, your hair!" she cried. "No, I will not powder

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it with gold, for already its waves are full of golden light; though here and there it might be well to add to it a morsel of powder, to make it look as though it had been kissed by the sun. That Lygian land of yours must be a marvellous place if it can produce maidens like yourself!"

"I cannot remember my native land," replied Lygia. "Ursus has told me that it contains only forests, endless forests."

"But in those forests there must be flowers," continued Acte, dipping her hands into a vase of vervain before rubbing Lygia's hair with the extract. Next she rubbed the girl's body gently with perfumed oils, and clothed her in a supple, sleeveless robe of cloth of gold, over which there was to go a snow-white peplum. For the moment, however, since Lygia's hair still remained to be dressed, Acte covered her shoulders with a dressing-gown, and, seating her upon a sofa, handed her over to the slaves. At length, the operation of hairdressing completed, the peplum was draped in light folds; after which Acte placed some pearls around the girl's neck, touched her hair with golden powder, and had herself robed by her own women.

Before long she and Lygia were ready; and just as the first litters were beginning to arrive at the principal entrance the two ladies posted themselves upon a verandah whence they could view both the entrance in question, the galleries, and the Court of Honour.

Gradually the crowd became thicker as an ever-increasing number of guests passed under an arch of the main gate that was crowned by the splendid quadriga of Lysias. To Lygia's eyes the spectacle seemed one of which, in Aulus' plain mansion, she could never have dreamt.

It was the hour of sunset, and the last declining rays of the sun were kissing the marble pillars to yellow, or warming them to a brilliant red. Among the pillars, and around white statues of the Danaïdes and of other gods and heroes, there flowed a stream of men and women who resembled the statues in that they were draped in togas and stoles which fell in supple folds to the feet. From above a single gigantic Hercules—his head still glowing in the light of the setting sun, but his body, from the breast downwards, darkened by the shadows of the columns—looked down upon the entrance-way.

Acte pointed out to Lygia the senators, with their wide-bordered togas, their coloured tunics, and their crescent-trimmed sandals; also knights, famous artists, and ladies who were dressed in the Greek or the Roman fashion, or else were clad in fantastic Eastern vestments, with

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coiffures like towers or pyramids, or copied from those of statues of goddesses—that is to say, with the hair cut low over the forehead, and decked with flowers. To many such men and women Acte could assign names, and sometimes add thereto some brief, but terrible, comments.

For Lygia this was a strange world of which the beauty intoxicated her eyes, while its contrasts appeared irreconcilable. From the radiance-spangled twilight, from those rows of pillars which trended away into the distance, from those statuesque human beings there seemed to arise a vast stillness, as though among the marbles with their severe outlines there were dwelling only demi-gods, full of peaceful joy. . . . But, alas! Acte's dull voice kept revealing the tortuous secrets of that palace and of those human folk.

"Down there," she said, "is a covered portico, the pillars and paving-stones of which still show red with the blood wherewith their purity was splashed when Caius Caligula fell beneath the dagger of Cassius. There, again, you see the place where his wife had her throat cut, and her infant was dashed to pieces against the paving-stones. There, again, under that wing of the palace, is a dungeon where the younger Drusus, tortured by hunger, took to gnawing his own wrists. There his elder brother was poisoned. There Gemellus howled with fear. There Claudius used to twist himself into convulsions. There Germanicus now laments his lot. In short, these walls have heard the gasps and death-rattle of many a human being in agony. Perhaps some of those who are now hastening to the banquet are already doomed to a like fate, for the smile of to-day may mask the anguish of to-morrow. Into the hearts of these bejewelled, flower-bedecked demi-gods the fever of jealousy and greed may already be eating its way."

Lygia's timid thoughts could not altogether follow Acte's words; but, though this marvellous world fascinated her eyes with an ever-increasing force, her soul had begun to regret Aulus' mansion and Græcina—had begun to regret the mansion where affection reigned supreme.

Every moment the stream of guests from the Vicus Apollinis kept growing. Without the gates there resounded a ceaseless din from clients who had escorted their patrons to the palace. Here and there, amid the white or the sun-burned faces, there loomed the dark visage of a Numidian, feather-crested and beset with earrings. Also, to the palace-gate there were being conveyed lutes, zithers, torches, and bouquets of hot-house flowers (for autumn was far advanced). Lastly, over all there floated a growing

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din of human voices, mingled with the splashing of fountains where, with a kind of sobbing music in the evening glow, the falling waters broke upon their basins.

Acte was now silent, but Lygia still kept gazing into the crowd, as though she were seeking some one. Suddenly her face blushed rosy-red. From behind a row of pillars there had come into view Petronius and Vinicius. God-like in bearing, they proceeded on their way towards the grand triclinium.

Lygia felt her heart grow lighter; all at once she felt less lonely. Sorrowful regrets for Pomponia and for Aulus' house now seemed to have ceased to hurt her. In short, the desire to see Vinicius, and to speak with him, had silenced in her all other desires. In vain she reminded herself of what Acte had said, and of what Pomponia had warned her against. Suddenly she realised not only that she must be present at the banquet, but also that she *wished* to be present. Indeed, at the thought that soon she would hear the dear voice which had once spoken to her of love and was still ringing in her ears, she became seized with an overmastering joy.

Yet of that joy she felt afraid, for she believed herself to be betraying the pure doctrine in which she had been brought up—to be betraying Pomponia, and to be betraying herself. Had she been alone, she would have gone upon her knees and beat her breast and said, "I have sinned, I have sinned!" but, as it was, Acte took her by the hand to lead her towards the triclinium, and Lygia moved away with her eyes dim and her ears ringing. As in a dream she could see myriads of lamps twinkling on the tables and the walls; as in a dream she could hear a cry raised at the approach of Cæsar; as through a dense mist she at last beheld Cæsar himself! Scarcely did she notice that, after seating her at a table, Acte took up a position on her right.

Then on her left a discreet and well-known voice said:

"Hail to the most beautiful of all earthly virgins, to the most beautiful of all stars in the heavens, to the divine Callina!"

Vinicius had conformed to established custom by doffing his toga, and appearing only in a scarlet tunic. From it his naked arms, encircled with bracelets, gleamed white (though, it may be, a trifle too sinewy, since they were the arms of a soldier, fashioned, rather, for the sword and the buckler). Also, he wore a wreath of roses, and, with his finely arched eyebrows, his splendid eyes, and his sunburnt skin, he looked the embodiment of youth and strength. Indeed, to Lygia's eyes he looked so handsome that she could scarcely return his greeting.

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He continued:

"Happy are my eyes in that they now behold you! Happy are my ears in that they now perceive your voice to be sweeter than zithers or flutes! As between Venus and yourself, it is *you*, my divinity, whom I would prefer to choose. I *knew* that I should see you here; yet at your coming my heart beat with a rapture that it had never before experienced."

His eyes were shining with boundless ardour; he was gazing at her as though he would have liked to have bathed his whole being in what he saw. Lygia, for her part, felt as though, in all that palace, and amid all that crowd, he alone was near her; wherefore she set herself to question him concerning many things which she could not understand, yet which filled her with fear. *How* had he known that he would find her in Cæsar's palace? Why was she there at all? Why had Cæsar taken her away from Pomponia? In this place everything made her afraid, and she wished to return to her mother. She was half-dead with longing and hopeless anxiety. Surely he and Petronius would intercede with Cæsar on her behalf? "

Vinicius explained to her that it was from Aulus himself that he had first heard of her removal. Why was she there? He did not know, since Cæsar never accounted to any one for his acts. However, she need not be afraid, since he, Vinicius, was near her, and would remain so. She was his life, and he would guard her as he would that life. But since Cæsar's palace made her tremble, she should not (here he swore an oath) remain long in it.

Though speaking evasively and at haphazard, his voice had in it the accent of sincerity, for the reason that his feeling for her was sincere.

Yes, sincere compassion had overtaken him; Lygia's words had gone to his very heart. When, therefore, she fell to thanking him, and to declaring that Pomponia would be very grateful to him for his goodness, while she herself would remember him to her dying day, he could no longer control his emotion, and his heart melted with delight. True, her beauty intoxicated his senses, and he felt that he desired her terribly; yet also he realised that she was dear to him beyond expression, and that he could well worship her as a divinity. The din and the bustle of the banquet wearied him. Leaning towards her, he began to murmur words sweet and simple, words straight from the heart, words as harmonious as music, as intoxicating as wine.

And those words Lygia drank in as though they had been wine indeed. Among the strangers around her, he seemed

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to be nearer and dearer to her than ever. Besides, he was so worthy of confidence, and so devoted to her! Formerly, at the Plautius' mansion, he had never spoken to her of love, nor of the happiness that comes of love, except in general terms; but now—! Her cheeks glowed, her heart bounded, and her lips were parted in ecstasy.

True, a sort of fear seized her as she listened to him: yet not for the world would she have lost any of his words. At one moment she would lower her eyes; the next she would raise them again, and fix them upon her lover with a radiant glance that was also timidly inquisitive, as though she would have said, "Pray go on speaking." The noise, the music, the smell of the flowers and the incense were all of them beginning to confuse her; but Vinicius was beside her—Vinicius who was so full of youth and strength and love and passion that Lygia, though filled also with a sense of pleasurable modesty, began to feel infected with the ardour which emanated from her adorer.

In the same way, the fact that he was near Lygia exercised upon Vinicius a powerful influence. In his breast there had begun to seethe a flame which he vainly attempted to stifle with wine.

With wine—yes, but stronger than wine were that marvellous face, those bare arms, that virgin breast which rose and fell under the golden tunic, that form which peeped from the folds of the snowy peplum. Suddenly he seized her by the wrist, as he had done once before in Aulus' house, and murmured with trembling lips:

"I love you, Callina! Divine one, I adore you!"

"Nay; you must release your hold, Marcus," she replied.

Again, with eyes dim and misty, he exclaimed:

"My adored one, love me in return! Only love me!"

"Cæsar is looking at you," the voice of Acte interrupted.

This caused Vinicius to feel seized with sudden resentment against Cæsar, as against Acte. Had not the latter's words dissipated the magic spell?—and at such a moment the young man would have thought even a well-beloved voice inopportune. Consequently he jumped to the conclusion that Acte's interruption had been *purposely* made. Raising his head, and glaring at the freedwoman over Lygia's shoulders, he said angrily:

"Acte, the time is past when you used to lie beside Cæsar at these banquets. Moreover, it is said that you are gradually going blind. How, therefore, could you contrive to read Cæsar's face so well?"

With a tinge of sadness in her voice Acte replied:

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"I *can* read it. He also has indifferent sight, yet he is eyeing you now through his emerald."

Lygia, who, at the beginning of the banquet, had viewed the Emperor as through a mist, and thereafter had been led by Vinicius' words wholly to forget the monarch, now turned curious, frightened eyes in Cæsar's direction.

Acte had spoken the truth. Cæsar, leaning forward across the table, was gazing at the pair with one eye half-closed and the other eye glued to an emerald monocle. As his glance encountered that of Lygia the maiden's heart seemed to turn to ice. While still a child, in the days when Aulus was campaigning in Sicily, she had heard an old Egyptian slave relate stories concerning dragons which lived in caves; and now it seemed to her that the glassy eye of one of these monsters was directed full upon her.

Like a frightened child she seized Vinicius' hand, while through her brain there whirled a series of swift, chaotic impressions. So *this* was Cæsar, the terrible, the all-powerful Cæsar! Never before had she seen him, and she had believed him to be very different to the reality. She had pictured to herself a face horrible of feature, and stamped for ever with fury; whereas she saw before her a huge head set upon a thick neck—a head which, though terrifying, was also grotesque—a head which, from a distance, resembled that of a child of tender years. Over his broad foreshortened face an amethyst tunic (a garment forbidden to all save himself) cast a bluish tinge, while his dark hair was dressed in four superimposed rows of curls, after the fashion initiated by Otho. Also, he was beardless, for the reason that he had recently surrendered that appendage to Jupiter, and Rome had lauded the deed, while secretly saving that he had acted thus merely because, like all his family, he had been red-bearded. In the striking prominence of his forehead above the eyebrows there was something Olympian, while the brows themselves revealed a consciousness of power: yet under that forehead as of a demi-god there grinned only a simian countenance that was marred by premature fleshiness, and charged with lust and inconstancy—the face of a low actor and drunkard. To Lygia he looked menacing, but above all things hideous.

Presently he lowered his monocle; and as he did so she caught sight of a pair of prominent blue eyes that were blinking under the excess of light, devoid of expression, and glassy as the eyes of a man in agony.

Turning to Petronius, Cæsar inquired:

"Is that the hostage with whom Vinicius is so much in love?"

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"Yes."

"Of what race does she come?"

"Of the Lygian race."

"And does Vinicius think her beautiful?"

"Well—were you to set a woman's peplum even upon the trunk of a withered olive-tree, Vinicius would still think the trunk beautiful. But on *your* face, O infallible judge, I already read your opinion. It is that the maiden is too thin, that she is too like a poppy-head growing on an over-thin stalk. What interests you, divine æsthete, is the stalk; and thrice over you are right. A face, in itself, signifies nothing. That I have frequently learnt from you, even though my sight can never hope to become as sure as yours. Therefore, like Tullius Senecio, I dare wager my mistress that, difficult though it be to judge of the proportions of a woman who is reclining at table, you have already said to yourself: 'The maiden is too narrow across the hips.'"

"Too narrow across the hips," re-echoed Nero with his eyes half-closed.

Petronius smiled covertly, while Tullius Senecio, who until then had been talking to Vestinus (or, rather, had been making fun of dreams, in the power of which his companion believed), now turned to the "Arbiter of Fashion," and, without knowing in the least what the subject was about, cried:

"You are wrong! I agree with Cæsar."

"Quite right," replied Petronius; "for I was just in the act of asserting that you had a few glimmerings of intelligence; whereas Cæsar was declaring you to be an ass pure and simple."

"Petronius habet!" cried Nero gaily, turning his thumb downwards in the manner employed when a gladiator was ordered to be given the *coup-de-grâce*.

As for Vestinus, believing that the subject under discussion was still that of dreams, he remarked:

"For myself I believe in visions, and to-day Seneca has informed me that he too believes in them."

"Last night I dreamt that I had become a vestal virgin," cried Calvia Crispinilla, leaning forward upon the table.

Upon this Nero clapped his hands, and the whole company, following his example, burst into applause; for Crispinilla—a woman who had again and again been divorced—was known throughout Rome for her incredible licence. In no way disconcerted, she continued:

"Well, what of it? Your vestal virgins are old and ugly. Rubia alone has any semblance of humanity. Thus there will be two of us—even though, this summer, her face has become riddled with sunspots."

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"Yet you will admit, purest Calvia," said Petronius, "that only in a dream could you ever become a vestal."

"Should Cæsar thus command—"

"Ah, next you will be making us believe that dreams, even the most fantastic of them, can come true."

"Certainly they can do so," said Vestinus. "For my part, I can understand a person not believing in the gods; but not to believe in dreams is—"

"But what of predictions?" asked Nero. "It has been predicted of me that though Rome shall come to an end, I am destined to rule the entire East."

"Dreams and predictions are equally capable of realisation," said Vestinus. "One day a proconsul who was sceptical on the subject sent a slave whom he had furnished with a sealed letter to the temple of Mopsus, in order to put the god to the proof; and the slave spent a night in the said temple for the purpose of having a prophetic dream. On his return home he related: 'In my dream I saw a young man, as beautiful as the sun, who spoke to me just one word—namely, "Black."' On hearing this the proconsul turned pale, and, turning to his guests (sceptics like himself), said: 'Know you what that letter contained?'"

"What *did* it contain?" asked Senecio.

"The letter had contained this question: 'What colour of bull ought I rather to sacrifice—a black or a white?'"

The interest aroused by this anecdote was interrupted by Vitellius, who had arrived drunk at the banquet, and now suddenly, for some reason or another, broke out into peal upon peal of laughter.

"What is that cask of tallow laughing at?" demanded Nero.

"Laughter is one of the human being's points of superiority over the beasts," said Petronius. "Consequently Vitellius has no other argument whereby to prove to us that he is not simply and solely a pig."

Vitellius ceased laughing, and, smacking his lips together (which were shining with grease and drops of sauce), fell to contemplating the servants, as though he had only just become aware of their presence. Then he raised a hand that resembled a silk cushion, and said in a weary voice:

"I have lost my knight's ring—a ring which was left to me by my father."

"Who was a cobbler by trade," added Nero. Almost as he spoke Vitellius became seized with another fit of ribald merriment, and was seen to be seeking his ring in the cloak of Calvia Crispinilla. On the other side of him

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Vatinus now began to imitate the cries of a frightened woman, while Calvia's friend, Nigidia—a young widow with the eyes of a courtesan and the face of a child—cried:

"What he is looking for he certainly has not lost."

"And if he ever finds it he will not know what to do with it," commented Lucan.

The scene was becoming more and more animated. Suddenly from great vases filled with snow and wreathed with ivy the attendants drew forth fresh jars of wine, while roses descended in a shower from the vaulted ceiling above. Next Petronius begged Nero, before the guests should become completely drunk, to render the occasion illustrious by singing them a song; and in chorus the guests seconded the proposal. At first Nero declined, for in good truth he was hoarse enough. During the night, he said, he had had leaden weights heaped on his chest, but to little avail: and now he thought of going to Antium for some sea air.

Lucan, however, adjured him in the name of art and of humanity. The world, he declared, knew that the divine poet, the incomparable singer, had composed a new hymn to Venus which would make the hymn written by Lucretius sound like the howl of a wolf-cub. Let Cæsar, therefore, render of this banquet a true festival. Paternal sovereign that he was, he ought not to inflict upon his subjects the torture of his silence.

"Be not pitiless, O Cæsar," concluded he.

"Nay; be not pitiless," re-echoed the assemblage.

Nero spread his hands in token that he felt forced to yield; whereupon every face took on an expression of gratitude, and every eye turned his way. First of all, however, Cæsar gave orders that Poppæa should be informed that he was about to sing (until that moment indisposition had prevented Augusta from being present at the banquet, and no remedy was likely to be so efficacious for her recovery as Cæsar's singing).

Without delay Poppæa entered. Hitherto she had reigned supreme over Nero's heart; yet where his vanity as a singer, as a charioteer, or as a poet was concerned she knew that it was dangerous to irritate him. So she entered, golden-haired, and clad, as he was, in an amethyst tunic, with a neck which glittered with huge pearls which had once formed part of the despoiled riches of Massinissa. Yet, though a woman twice divorced, she had the face and bearing of a virgin. On all sides there arose acclamations, while again and again she was hailed as "Divine Augusta." Never in her life had Lygia beheld such beauty. She could not believe her eyes. *This*, then, was the infamous

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Poppæa who had incited Cæsar to murder his mother *and* his wife—the Poppæa whose statues were frequently overturned by the populace during the night, and who was wont to be insulted in inscriptions written on walls! Lygia could not have pictured to herself even the angels of heaven adorned with more charming loveliness.

"Ah, Marcus!" she exclaimed. "Is it possible?"

"Yes, she *is* beautiful," he replied; "but *you* are a hundred times more so. If it were not that you take no heed of your charms, you would soon become enamoured of yourself, even as Narcissus did. Poppæa is wont to bathe her body in asses' milk; but it is in Venus' milk that *you* have been washed. Do not look at Augusta: turn your eyes to myself again. Touch the brim of this cup with your lips, while I lay upon it my own."

And he leant closer and closer to her, while she kept withdrawing ever nearer to Acte. But now Cæsar rose to his feet, and in his hands the singer Diodorus placed a delta lute, while the singer Terpnos made ready to accompany him on an instrument called the nablium. Resting the lute upon the table, Nero raised his eyes to the ceiling, and in all the banquetting-hall there reigned a silence broken only by the silken rustling of the falling roses.

Accompanied on a lute, Cæsar sang—or, rather, recited in a sort of chant—his hymn to Venus. His voice, though muffled, was, like his verses, not wholly without charm; with the result that poor Lygia was seized with remorse. The hymn, though it glorified only an impure and pagan Venus, seemed to the girl exceedingly beautiful, and Cæsar himself—crowned with laurels and lifting his eyes to heaven—more majestic and less awe-inspiring than he had hitherto appeared.

A storm of applause greeted the conclusion of the hymn. "What a divine voice!" resounded from every quarter of the hall. Some of the women who had raised their arms aloft as though in ecstasy when the hymn had begun, remained in this posture long after it had finished. Others wiped away the tears from their eyes. Everywhere there arose a buzz of excited comment. As for Poppæa, she lowered her gilded head, and pressed her lips to Nero's hand, and remained thus for a long while without speaking; while the young Pythagoras, a Greek of marvellous comeliness (in later days the half-insane Cæsar married him, with full ceremonial at the hands of the flamina or priests), flung himself at the Emperor's feet.

Yet the person whom Nero most covertly watched was Petronius, since the monarch valued his approval more

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than he did that of all other men. Petronius' dictum was as follows:

"In my opinion, Orpheus must be as yellow with envy of the beauty of this hymn as Lucan evidently is. As for the verses themselves, I should have preferred them to be less good, for then I should have been able to find praises not unworthy of such a masterpiece."

This pronouncement was taken by Lucan in good part. Exchanging a look of intelligence with the speaker, he proceeded to feign the humour of the moment, and replied:

"O cursed destiny, which has made me the contemporary of such a poet! Otherwise might I have won me a place in the remembrance of mankind, and on the Mount of Phœbus. Yet now I am eclipsed by Cæsar as is a rushlight by the sun!"

Upon this Petronius, who had a facile memory, set himself to repeat certain passages from the hymn—quoting isolated verses, and analysing and praising their happier phrases. Lucan appeared charmed with the poem, and added his laudatory comments to those of Petronius.

Nero was delighted. He himself pointed out verses which he thought more particularly fine; after which he presumed to console Lucan by telling him that he must not despair, since, without doubt, every one was cast for the part to which he was born, and adoration of Jupiter ought not to exclude worship of the remaining gods.

Next, Cæsar rose to lead away Poppæa, who, being really ill, was desirous of departing; but first he invited his other guests not to leave their places. A moment later he had returned, eager to witness the spectacle which, in conjunction with Petronius and Tigellinus, he had prepared.

As a beginning, further verses were recited, the extravagance of which failed to redeem their *banalité*. Next, the celebrated mimic, Paris, gave a representation of the adventures of Io, daughter of Inachus. Never, in Lygia's opinion, had such miracles and spells been witnessed; for by dint of sundry movements of his arms and body Paris succeeded in rendering the semblance of things otherwise incapable of expression. As his hands beat the air they seemed to send forth a light, tremulous nimbus of voluptuous vibrations, as though a virgin's body were palpitating with ecstasy. The performance was a picture rather than a dance—a picture which revealed the mystery of love itself; and when, as a sequel, there entered corybantes, who, with Syrian ballet-girls, executed, to the sound of zithers, flutes, cymbals, and tambourines, a bacchanalian measure that was full of savage cries and

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barbaric orgies, Lygia felt that surely the ceiling would crack and descend upon the heads of the guests.

Yet from the golden net above them there kept falling only roses, nothing but roses. By her side Vinicius, half-intoxicated, said:

"The moment that I first saw you in Aulus' house, near the fountain, I fell in love with you. It was at dawn, when you thought that no eye in the world beheld you; but I saw you. And still I can see you as I did then, despite the peplum which conceals your form. Let it slip from you, as Crispinilla has allowed hers to do. See! Both men and gods are thirsting for love. In all the world there is nothing but love, only love. Lay your head upon my breast, and close your eyes."

In his temples and his wrists the arteries were beating loudly, while she felt overcome with a sensation as of sinking and of giddiness. Instead of coming to her rescue, Vinicius now seemed to be drawing her towards the abyss, and to have become her enemy. Once more she felt afraid of the banquet, of him, and of herself.

Then a voice like Pomponia's sounded in her soul. "Take care, Lygia!" it said. Yet something else cried out that it was now too late. For having been encircled by those flames, for having been present at that scene, for having panted at the sound of Vinicius' voice she felt herself lost beyond recall.

However, the end of the festival was by no means yet reached. Still the slaves were serving fresh courses, and pouring wine into the garlanded cups of the guests.

Presently in front of the great table (which formed a half-circle) there appeared a couple of athletes. At once they closed with one another—their oiled torsos seeming to form a single block of muscle, their bones cracking under the grip of one another's brawny arms, and their teeth grinding in their jaws. Now and again the saffron-powdered stones of the floor would re-echo with the trampling of their naked feet as at one moment the wrestlers halted as motionless as marble statues, and, the next, recommenced the struggle. The Romans present followed with delight the play of straining spines, of knotted calves, and of tense-drawn arms. But the contest could not last for ever. At length Croto, master of the school for gladiators, justified his title to be accounted the strongest man within the Empire, for the breathing of his adversary quickened, he caught his breath, his face turned blue, and he coughed a gout of blood before sinking to the ground.

Loud applause greeted the end of the bout as Croto, his foot planted upon the back of the vanquished wrestler,

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and his enormous arms crossed, looked round upon the audience with the air of a conqueror.

Next there entered imitators of the cries of animals, as well as jugglers and buffoons; but these created no great stir, owing to the fact that wine had dimmed the eyesight of all present. Moreover, the Syrian dancing-girls had now mingled with the guests, and the music had become a confused hubbub of zithers, lutes, Armenian cymbals, Egyptian sistra, trumpets and horns; and, since certain of the guests wished to indulge in further conversation, cries began to be raised for the dismissal of the musicians. The air was heavy with the scent of the oils with which boys of marvellous beauty had never ceased to moisten the feet of the company. Cloyed with saffron, with the exhalations of human beings, and with the odours of flowers, it even rendered breathing difficult. From above, the lamps shone with a dull, colourless light upon sweat-bedewed foreheads from which the garlands were fast slipping down.

Vitellus had now disappeared beneath the table, while Nigidia—the upper portion of her body unclothed—was resting her childlike head, in a state of absolute intoxication, upon the breast of Lucan; who, drunk himself, ever and anon blew away the gold with which the child's locks were powdered. For the tenth time Vestinus was repeating Mopsus' reply to the sealed letter of the proconsul, and Tullius, the scorner of gods, was saying with his pasty mouth and hiccupping voice:

"If one admits that Xenophon's Spheros is a perfectly round god, then that god must be a deity that one could roll along like a barrel."

But at these sallies Domitius Afer, the extortioner and informer, was indignant—so much so that he spilt Falernian wine all over his tunic. *He*, he declared, still believed in the gods. People said that Rome must perish, and certainly she must; but if that were to come about, it would be the fault of certain young men who were without faith. And beyond a doubt virtue had ceased altogether to exist, for the stern customs of yore were being abandoned. Could the Epicureans compete with the barbarians? No; disaster was inevitable. For himself, he regretted that he had lived so long—that he should now be forced to seek in pleasure forgetfulness of the patriotic disappointment which was wearing him to a shadow.

Then he caught hold of one of the Syrian dancers, and with his toothless mouth began to kiss her on the shoulders and back. On seeing this, Consul Memmius Regulus burst out laughing, and, raising his hot head, cried:

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"Who, then, pretends that Rome is perishing? What folly! I, as Consul, know *one* thing, do I not? Yes, I know that there are thirty legions to guarantee the Pax Romana."

He beat his fists against his temples, and cried again at the top of his voice:

"Thirty legions! Thirty legions! Yes, from Britain to the frontiers of the Parthians!"

Suddenly he seemed to become reflective, and sat thinking for a moment, his finger to his forehead.

"Nay!" he ejaculated. "I believe that there are but thirty-two," and straightway rolled under the table, where before long he began to vomit up all the flamingos' tongues, roasted leeks, iced mushrooms, locusts stewed in honey, fish, meat, and everything else, that he had eaten or drunk.

However, Domitius was not to be appeased by assurances of the number of legions available for preserving the Pax Romana.

"No, no," he said. "Rome must perish, for the reason that both faith in the gods and strict morality are dead. Yes, Rome must one day fall. But what matter? Life is sweet, and Cæsar is good, and this wine is delicious. I repeat, what matter?" With this he buried his head on the bacchante's shoulder, and burst into tears.

"A fig for the life to come!" he continued presently. "Achilles was right when he said that it is better to be the lowest of cowherds in this world than a king in the Cimmerian regions."

By this time Lucan had blown away the last remaining specks of golden powder on Nigidia's hair, and she was slumbering peacefully. Removing the ivy which adorned a neighbouring jar of wine, he threw it, as a garland, over the head of the sleeping woman; after which he wreathed himself in a similar garland, and remarked with an air of profound conviction:

"I am not a man. I am a faun."

Petronius, for his part, had steered clear of intoxication; but Nero, who, at first, had been too solicitous for his beautiful voice to drink much, had since emptied cup after cup, and was now completely fuddled. He tried to sing some more verses—this time in Greek, but could not recall them, and in their stead bellowed out a song of Anacreon's, in the chorus of which he was joined for a time by Pythagoras, Diodorus, and Terpnos, until the latter found that they had but indifferent mastery over their voices. Whereupon they relapsed into silence.

Next, Nero, as a connoisseur and an æsthete, fell to

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expatiating upon Pythagoras' beauty, and kissed the lad's hands admiringly. Such comely hands, he declared, he had not seen since—since— Claspings his forehead, he tried to spur his memory. Suddenly his face clouded over. His mother? Yes, surely those hands resembled those of his mother, Agrippina? Dark visions of the past had come over him.

"Men declare," he said, "that by moonlight she still flits over the waters around Baia and Baula—that she wanders and wanders as though she were looking for something. Now and then she will approach a ship, and gaze at it, and then disappear; but upon whichever of the fishermen her glance has fallen, to that man death soon comes."

"An effective subject for a poem," remarked Petronius; while Vestinus, stretching out his heron's neck, chuckled with an air of mystery.

"The gods I do *not* believe in," he said, "but in spectres I *do* believe. Now, spectres——"

But Nero had not heard the speakers.

"I have duly observed the Lemuralia," he continued, "for I wish to see her no more. Five years, five years is it since— I was forced, I was forced, I tell you, to condemn her to death; for she had suborned an assassin. Had I not forestalled her, you would never have been able to hear me sing to-night."

"Then we thank you, Cæsar," cried Domitius Afer. "We thank you both in the name of the city and in that of the universe."

"Wine! And let the tympani send forth their thunder!"

With that the hubbub recommenced. Lucan, in his mantle of greenery, tried to overtop the din by rising in his seat and shouting:

"I am not a man. I am a faun, and have my dwelling in the forest. Eho-o-o-oo!"

Cæsar too was drunk. Men, women, every one was drunk—Vinicius as much as the rest. Indeed, in the latter a contest was raging between desire and the lust to pick a quarrel. His swarthy face clouded as he shouted thickly at the top of his voice:

"Give me your lips, Lygia. To-day or to-morrow—'tis all one. We can wait. Cæsar has taken you away from Aulus to hand you over to me. Do you hear? To-morrow at nightfall I am going to send for you. Do you hear *that*? Cæsar has promised to let me have you. You *shall* be mine. Give me your lips, then—give me your lips. I cannot wait until to-morrow. Quick! Your lips, your lips!"

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And he seized her in his arms. She struggled desperately, with a feeling that she must succumb. Vainly with her hands she sought to disengage the grasp of that hairless arm. Vainly, with mingled terror and bitterness in her voice, did she beg of him to desist, to have pity upon her.

The breath from his drunken mouth seemed to be growing stronger, and to be enveloping her in a sort of mist. His darkened face seemed ever to be drawing nearer and nearer. He was no longer the good Vinicius, the Vinicius whom she had almost loved, but, rather, a Vinicius who resembled an evil satyr. Vainly, as his strength drew her closer and closer to him, did she throw herself backwards and turn away her head to escape his kisses. He merely raised himself up, seized her by the arms, dragged her head down upon his breast, and, with panting eagerness, pressed her bloodless lips to his own.

Suddenly some tremendous force disengaged his arms, as though they had been those of a child, and at the same time sent him spinning backwards as though he had been a straw or a withered leaf. What had happened? Vinicius rubbed his eyes in amazement, and saw behind him the gigantic figure of Ursus, the Lygian.

The latter was standing quietly where he was, but the eyes with which he regarded Vinicius had in them an expression so singular that the young man felt his blood run cold. Then the giant raised his mistress in his arms, and calmly walked away from the triclinium—Acte behind him.

For a moment or two Vinicius stood petrified. Then he leapt to his feet, and rushed towards the door.

"Lygia! Lygia!" he cried.

Desire, bewilderment, fury, and intoxication all helped to render his footing unsteady. He staggered, stumbled, and, cannoning against the bare shoulders of a Syrian bacchante, demanded with blinking eyelids:

"What has happened?"

The woman smiled with misty eyes, and tendered him a cup of wine.

"Drink," she said.

He did so, and collapsed upon the flag-stones. Indeed, most of the guests were wallowing under the table, and only a few were lurching about the room, or colliding, at intervals, with the walls, while others were sleeping as they sat, and, in their slumber, belching or vomiting forth the surplus of their potations.

Upon these drunken consuls, senators, knights, poets, philosophers, dancers, and well-born ladies; upon this assemblage which, though still powerful, had lost its soul;

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upon this world which was rolling towards the abyss in a state of utter, though flower-bedecked, debauchery — upon them all, I say, there kept ever falling, from the golden network that was stretched across the roof, showers of roses.

Out of doors the dawn had come.

VIII

No one stopped Ursus; no one asked him any questions. Those of the guests who had not yet subsided under the table had left their places; wherefore the servants, seeing a lady in the arms of a giant, merely supposed that a slave was conveying home his intoxicated mistress. Moreover, Acte was in attendance upon the couple, and her presence dissipated all suspicion.

From the triclinium the trio passed into a neighbouring apartment, and thence to the gallery which led to Acte's suite of rooms. Lygia's strength had now completely left her body, and she hung as limp as a corpse in Ursus' arms. Presently, however, the freshness of the morning breeze caused her to open her eyes, and moment by moment the daylight grew clearer. Following the colonnade for a short distance, the party then turned aside towards a door which gave, not upon the Court of Honour, but upon the gardens, where already the tops of the pines and the cypresses were being touched to colour by the sunrise.

This part of the palace lay deserted, and the music and other sounds of the festival scarcely penetrated thither. It seemed to Lygia as though she had been rescued from Hell, and restored to God's daylight. Surely there existed another world than that abject banqueting-hall? Yes, there existed God's heaven, and the dawn, and light, and peace. A desire to weep arose within her as, pressing herself closer to Ursus, she repeated, choking with her sobs:

"Home, Ursus! Home, to Aulus' house!"

"Yes, we will return thither," said the giant.

Soon they had reached the small atrium of Acte's suite of apartments. Ursus arranged Lygia upon a marble bench near the fountain, and, in return, was exhorted by her to calm himself and take some rest, since no danger now threatened her, seeing that the Emperor's guests would sleep till evening. Yet herself Lygia could not calm as she sat pressing her hands to her temples, and repeating like a child:

"Home! Home!"

Ursus was willing enough to take her, for although a few

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prætorian guards were guarding the palace entrance, they would stop no one who *issued* from it, while in front of the triumphal arch there was waiting a bevy of litters to which the Emperor's guests would soon be coming out in batches. No one, therefore, was likely to be prevented from leaving, and the party would be able to mingle with the throng, and to go straight home. For the rest—well, what? Ursus' queen had given him her orders, and it was for him to obey them. He was there for that very purpose.

So Lygia kept repeating: "Yes, Ursus; let us go now:" with the result that Acte had to do the thinking for the whole party, and her reasoning was as follows. If they departed, very well—no one would hinder them; but to flee from Cæsar's mansion was an insult to the Throne, and would be punished as such. Suppose, then, they departed—well, that same evening a centurion and some soldiers would arrive with a sentence of death for Aulus and Pomponia, coupled with orders to take Lygia back to the palace—in which case she would be lost irretrievably. Again, should the Aulus family receive her, their death was certain. Lygia must choose, therefore, between her own ruin and that of Plautius. Before the banquet she (Acte) had hoped that Petronius and Vinicius would intercede for Lygia, and restore her to Pomponia; but now there could be no doubt that it was they who had first suggested to Cæsar the idea of abducting the girl from the Aulus establishment. No, there was no escape from the situation. Only a miracle could save Lygia from the abyss—a miracle to be wrought by Almighty God.

"But, Acte," cried Lygia in despair, "did you hear what Vinicius said—that Cæsar had given him myself, and that to-night he intends to have me fetched by his slaves, and taken to his house?"

"Yes, I heard what he said," replied Acte as she spread out her arms with an expressive gesture. Thereafter she said no more, for the despair that was vibrating in Lygia's voice found no echo in the heart of the freedwoman, who, having been Cæsar's mistress, could not, for all that her heart, at bottom, was good, feel the infamy of such a connection. That is to say, though a slave no longer, she had the law of slavery ingrained in her very blood. Always she had loved Nero. Had he deigned now to return to her, she would have stretched out to him eager arms, and welcomed her happiness. Consequently, though Lygia found herself faced with the alternative of becoming the mistress of the young and handsome Vinicius or of devoting both the Aulus family and herself to certain ruin, Acte could not conceive that the young girl would hesitate.

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"You will be no safer in Cæsar's palace than you would be in Vinicius' mansion," said the freedwoman. Never for a moment did Acte dream that, taken literally, her words meant, "Resign yourself to your fate, and become Vinicius' concubine." But Lygia, who still could feel on her lips the bruise inflicted by kisses that were full of a bestial desire, flushed crimson with shame.

"Never!" she exclaimed. "I will remain neither here nor in Vinicius' house! No, never!"

Acte stood aghast at the revolt.

"Do you detest him so *very* much?" she inquired.

Lygia made no reply, for at that moment she was taken with a fresh storm of sobbing. Acte drew her to her breast, and did her best to calm her, while Ursus drew a deep breath, and clenched his fists. His dog-like affection could not bear to see his queen in tears. Ever in his half-savage heart there was rising a desire to return to the banqueting-room, and there to strangle Vinicius, and, if need be, also Cæsar. However, he hesitated to propose this to his mistress, for would not such a course seem unbecoming in a follower of the Lamb Crucified?

Folding Lygia in her arms, Acte repeated:

"Do you detest him so *very* much?"

"No," said Lygia. "I am forbidden to detest him, for I am a Christian."

"Yes, I know, Lygia; and also I know from the Epistles of Paul of Tarsus that you may not submit yourself to dishonour, nor fear death more than sin. But tell me—does your doctrine allow you to bring about the death of others?"

"No."

"Then how can you think of causing the wrath of Cæsar to fall upon the house of Aulus?"

A silence followed. Again the abyss had opened before Lygia.

The young freedwoman continued:

"I have asked you this question because I am sorry for you, and for our good Pomponia, and for Aulus, and for their child. I have long dwelt in this abode, and know what the wrath of Cæsar can mean. No, you cannot flee this place. Only one thing can you do. You must beg Vinicius to restore you to Pomponia."

But Lygia had sunk upon her knees in supplication of another power than Vinicius; and a moment later Ursus had done the same. Thus did the two kneel in prayer in the house of Cæsar. Acte could not remove her eyes from Lygia, as, with her profile in high relief, the young girl raised eyes and hands to heaven, as though she hoped thence

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to see deliverance appear. Upon the darkness of her hair the dawn was now pouring a stream of light that found its reflection in the clear pupils of her eyes. Surrounded by radiance, she looked the very embodiment of radiance. Her pale face, her half-opened lips, her imploring eyes, all were eloquent of supernatural exaltation. In that moment Acte understood why it was that Lygia could never become a concubine. There opened before the eyes of Nero's former mistress a curtain behind which she saw outlined a world wholly different from that with which she had hitherto been familiar. Lygia's prayer in this palace of crime and infamy had stupefied her. Hitherto she had thought there to be no escape for the prisoner; but now it had dawned upon her that an unwonted and formidable circumstance *might* arise to aid the girl—a circumstance before which Cæsar himself would have to bow the head. "From heaven," thought Acte, "there will descend winged cohorts to save the maiden; or else the sun will fashion for her a couch of his rays, and absorb her into his own essence." Indeed, on seeing Lygia at prayer, *no* marvel seemed to the freedwoman to be wholly improbable.

At length Lygia rose to her feet again, with her face once more serene. Ursus also rose to an upright posture, and then crouched down beside the bench as he gazed at his mistress in expectation of her speaking.

Lygia's eyes were misty, and two great tears rolled slowly over her cheeks.

"May God bless Aulus and Pomponia!" she said. "I have no right to bring about their ruin. I will see them no more."

Then, turning to Ursus, she told him that he alone in all the world remained to her, and that therefore he must stand to her both as a protector and as a father. If they could not take refuge with the Aulus family, neither could they stay in Cæsar's house, nor in that of Vinicius. Ursus, therefore, must take her, and get her out of the city to some place where they could lie so completely hidden that neither Vinicius nor any one else would be able to discover them. For her own part, she would follow Ursus everywhere—even over the seas, or across the mountains to barbaric regions whither neither the name nor the power of Rome had yet penetrated.

In token of his readiness to obey, the Lygian kissed her feet. Acte, however, had looked for a miracle to happen, and her face reflected her disappointment. *This* was all the effect that the prayer had had! To flee the palace was to insult the Sovereign, who would straightway be revenged;

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and even should Lygia succeed in concealing herself, Cæsar would wreak vengeance upon the Aulus family. If Lygia wished to flee, let her flee from *Vinicius'* mansion; and the more so since Cæsar's dislike of interference in other men's affairs would probably prevent him from aiding Vinicius in the subsequent hue and cry.

This, however, by no means coincided with Lygia's ideas. The Aulus family should never know where she was—no, not even Pomponia. She, Lygia, would make her escape on the way *to*, not *from*, Vinicius' mansion; for in his state of intoxication he had had the impudence to say that that night he was going to send his slaves to fetch her. Ursus would be able to save her. He would come and lift her up in his arms, as he had done when removing her from the banqueting-hall, and thus they would betake themselves elsewhere. No one could stop Ursus. Even the terrible wrestler of the banqueting-hall could not possibly withstand him. But suppose Vinicius should take it into his head to send a great number of slaves to escort her? Well, in that case Ursus should go to the Archbishop Linus and ask for his assistance and advice.

Then the Archbishop would order his Christians to go to the rescue, and to save her by force. Lastly Ursus would find a method of removing her altogether out of the Roman power.

Upon this her face again became rosy and smiling. Throwing herself upon the freedwoman's neck, she pressed her exquisite mouth to Acte's cheek, and whispered:

"*You* will not betray us, will you?"

"No! By the shade of my mother I will never betray you. Only pray to your God that Ursus may find a means of delivering you."

Meanwhile Ursus had been gazing in front of him, as though he were thinking of things which had happened long ago. At last he murmured:

"To our forests! Ah, to those forests, to those forests!"

But these visions he soon shook off. He would go at once to the Archbishop, and, as soon as ever evening had come, mount guard with a hundred men over the litter. Let the prætorian guards escort it as much as they liked: he merely advised no one to venture within reach of his fists, even if that man were clad in an iron cuirass! One honest blow of his fist upon a helmet—and woe betide the individual whom that helmet covered!

At this Lygia raised a warning finger, and said with severe yet childlike dignity:

"Ursus, 'thou shalt do no murder.'"

The Lygian doubled his arm—an arm like the trunk of a

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tree—behind his head, and muttered, as he rubbed the nape of his neck in some embarrassment, that beyond all things it was necessary to rescue her—her, his light upon earth. So far as was possible he would force himself to—Well, if involuntarily he should—? In any case she must be rescued; and if he should meet with an unfortunate occurrence, he would be penitent, he would earnestly entreat the Spotless Son of God that the Lamb Crucified would have pity upon a poor mortal. *He* did not want to offend the Lamb—oh no! Only, he had a heavy hand, and—

At this point strong emotion showed itself in his face, and, to conceal it, he again saluted his queen, and said:

“Very well. Now I will go to the Archbishop.”

As for Acte, she threw her arms around Lygia’s neck, and burst into tears. Once before there had dawned upon her the fact that there existed a world where suffering was more productive of pleasure than all the world of magnificence and sensuality in Cæsar’s palace. Once before she had seen half-opened a gate of infinite radiance, but had felt herself unworthy to cross its threshold.

IX

LYGIA had begun greatly to miss Pomponia Græcina, whom she loved with her entire soul. Indeed, she missed the whole Aulus family and their house. Yet her despair did not last long. She even experienced a certain tender joy in telling herself that she was about to sacrifice ease and comfort on the altar of Truth, and for Truth’s sake to condemn herself to a wandering and uncertain life. Perhaps in these speculations a certain childlike curiosity played a part—a curiosity to pry into existence in far-off regions where there lived only barbarians and wild deer; but still more was she influenced by a sure conviction that, in acting in this manner, she was accomplishing the will of the Divine Master, who, in return, would watch over her as His devout and obedient child. That being so, what could befall her? If suffering should assail her, she would bear it in His name. If death should suddenly come upon her, Christ would take her to Himself; and one day, when Pomponia also died, she and Lygia would be reunited for all eternity.

As it was now broad daylight, and the sun was lighting up the triclinium, Acte persuaded her companion to take some necessary rest after the sleepless night. To this Lygia made no objection, and soon the two women had

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retired to a cubiculum the luxurious appointments of which dated from the days of the freedwoman's relations with Cæsar. There Acte and Lygia lay side by side. Yet the former, for all her weariness, could not sleep. To her customary melancholy there had become added an uneasiness which she had never before experienced. Hitherto her life had seemed to her supreme and without a to-morrow; but now she suddenly saw it become an ignoble thing. In her brain confusion kept growing and growing. Once more the gate towards the light kept alternately opening and shutting: yet, whenever it opened, the light dazzled her, and she could see nothing. Nevertheless in that light, she felt, there was contained an immeasurable happiness beside which all other lights became extinguished so completely that if, for example, Cæsar had contrived to elude Poppæa, and to return to the freedwoman, the latter would have looked upon the boon as a bagatelle. Suddenly the idea seized her that even the Cæsar whom she had loved and revered as a species of demi-god was, in reality, even as a slave, and that that palace with its marble colonnades was, in reality, worth but a heap of pebbles!

Imagining that Lygia, whose horizon was clouded with menace and uncertainty, must, like herself, be unable to woo slumber, Acte turned in her direction to discuss the project of the flight.

"She *is* sleeping!—she actually *can* sleep!" mused the freedwoman. "What a mere child she is!"

Yet Lygia was a child who could prefer misery to shame, and a wandering life to the splendid mansion of the Carinæ, to magnificence, to jewels, to banquets, to the sound of zithers and lutes.

Acte looked at the sleeper.

"How different is this maiden to myself!" she thought.

At the same time the young Greek's heart was incapable of envy; and the thought of the dangers which threatened Lygia caused the freedwoman to become seized with an immense pity, added to a sort of maternal feeling. She covered with caresses the dark hair of the sleeping girl, whose slumbers were as peaceful as though she were at home under Pomponia's care. Only towards midday did Lygia open her eyes and gaze around the cubiculum with a stupefied expression. So she was not at home with the Aulus family?

"Is that you, Acte?" she said on catching sight of the young woman's pale face amid the darkness.

"Yes; it is I, Lygia."

"Has evening yet come?"

"No, my child. It is but afternoon."

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"And has Ursus returned?"

"No. Remember that he is going to watch the litter to-night."

"Yes; true."

The two women left the cubiculum, and entered the bath-room. The bath completed, and the midday meal partaken of, Acte conducted Lygia to the gardens of the palace—a place where no awkward encounter was to be feared, seeing that Cæsar and his friends were still asleep. It was the first time that Lygia had seen these splendid pleasaunces. Among cypresses, pines, oak-trees, olives, and myrtles there gleamed a perfect multitude of white statues, while from a number of fountains the spray sprinkled itself over clumps of roses, and swans swam about in sparkling ponds.

After walking for a little while, the two women seated themselves in a cypress grove, and fell to discussing Lygia's intended escape. Acte was beginning to feel less and less sure of the enterprise, while her compassion for Lygia was increasing. Indeed, she thought that it would have been a thousand times better to have sought to influence Vinicius.

"Do you not think, Lygia," she said, "that we might induce Vinicius to restore you to Pomponia?"

"No; for though, in the Auluses' house, he was quite another person—indeed a much better one—I have been afraid of him ever since the banquet, and would rather go straight to the Auluses'."

"Yet you liked him at the Auluses'?" pursued Acte as she kissed Lygia's head.

"Yes."

Acte reflected a moment.

"You are not a slave as I have been," she said. "You are a hostage and a king's daughter. Moreover, the Auluses love you as though you were their own daughter, and would, I feel assured, one day adopt you. Consequently Vinicius might *marry* you, Lygia."

"Nevertheless I would rather return to the Auluses'," replied Lygia with increasing despondency.

"Shall I go at once to Vinicius, and say to him: 'Vinicius she is a king's daughter, and the beloved child of the great Aulus. If you love her, restore her to the Aulus mansion, and then go yourself thither and woo her for your wife'?"

The young girl merely answered in a voice so low that Acte scarcely heard it:

"No. I would rather flee."

Here a clatter of footsteps interrupted them; and before Acte could see who was approaching they found themselves confronted by Poppæa and a band of slaves. Over Augusta's head two women were gently waving fans of

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ostrich feathers, while an Ethiopian, her breasts swelling with milk, was carrying in her arms a baby wrapped in purple.

Poppæa came to a halt.

"Acte," she said, "the bells which you sewed on to this doll were badly sewn, for the child has pulled one off, and put it to his lips. Luckily Lilith saw him in time."

"Pardon me, my lady," said Acte, crossing her hands upon her bosom, and bending low her head.

Next Poppæa looked at Lygia.

"Who is this slave?" she inquired.

"She is not a slave, O divine Augusta, but an adopted daughter of Pomponia Græcina, and the daughter of the Lygian king, who has sent her as a hostage to Rome."

"Has she come to pay you a visit?"

"No, Augusta. Since the day before yesterday she has been living in the palace."

"And was she present at the banquet?"

"Yes, she was present."

"By whose order?"

"By Cæsar's."

Upon this Poppæa regarded the girl with more attention, while a furrow gathered between her eyebrows. Jealous of her supremacy, she lived in a perpetual state of terror lest she should see herself supplanted by some more fortunate rival, even as she herself had supplanted Octavia.

One glance sufficed to show her how marvellous was Lygia's beauty.

"She is a perfect nymph!" she said to herself. "Venus, and no other, must have given her birth, ye immortal gods, for she is as fair as I am, and even younger!"

Under her golden eyelashes Poppæa's eyes had in them a steely glitter. Nevertheless, as she turned to Lygia, she was, to all outward appearances, calm.

"Have you spoken to Cæsar?" she asked of Lygia.

"No, Augusta."

"Why would you rather be here than with the Auluses?"

"Because I would rather *not* be here. Petronius has asked Cæsar to take me away from Pomponia, and I am here only against my will."

"Then you would like to go back to Pomponia?" The question was put in a kinder tone, and Lygia experienced a spasm of hope.

"Augusta," she cried, with outstretched arms, "Cæsar is going to give me to Vinicius as a slave; but do *you* intercede for me, and restore me to Pomponia."

"So Petronius has suggested to Cæsar that you should be taken away from the Auluses in order to be handed over to Vinicius?"

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"Yes; and Vinicius has said that he is going to send for me to-day. But *you* will be kind; *you* will have pity upon me?"

Bending down, Lygia seized the hem of Poppæa's robe, and waited with a beating heart. Poppæa glanced at her with an evil smile on her face, and said:

"That being so, I promise you that this very day you shall have become Vinicius' slave."

Then she moved away—an imposing, but a sinister, figure. To the ears of Acte and Lygia there came borne the cries of the child, who had burst out weeping afresh. Lygia's eyes were dim with tears as she took Acte by the hand.

"Come," she said. "We can hope for succour only from the quarter whence all succour is sent."

Then they re-entered the atrium, and remained there. Every moment they strained their ears to catch the sound of footsteps. Conversation ceased, and silence reigned—a silence that was grim, and charged with illusions of hearing. Towards nightfall the curtains before the door suddenly moved, and a man with a dark, pock-marked face made his appearance. Lygia knew him, for she had seen him before at Pomponia's house. It was Atacinus, a freedman in the service of Vinicius. Acte uttered a cry.

The freedman bowed low, and said:

"Greeting to the divine Lygia from Marcus Vinicius. He awaits you at table in his garlanded mansion."

"I am ready," replied Lygia; but her lips were white. Throwing her arms around Acte's neck, she bid her farewell.

X

TRUE enough, Vinicius' mansion was decked throughout with verdure. On the walls and over the doorways there hung festoons of ivy and myrtle, while between the columns there swayed ropes of vines. Candelabra of alabaster, marble, and Corinthian bronze—the works of famous masters—were fashioned to represent beasts, plants, or women, and had burning in them perfumed oil, while their light was softened by globes of Alexandrian glass, which, in their turn, sent forth, through veils of Indian gauze, rays of red, yellow, mauve, or peacock-blue. The air was heavy with nard—a perfume with which Vinicius had first become acquainted in the East. In the dining-hall covers were laid for four guests, since Petronius and Chrysothemis also were to take part in the entertainment.

In everything Vinicius had followed Petronius' advice—

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the latter having suggested to him that he should not go in person to fetch Lygia, but dispatch, for the purpose, his freedman Atacinus, armed with Cæsar's commission.

"You were drunk last night," said Petronius. "I saw you carrying on like a stone-cutter of the Alban Hills. Do not be too enterprising, and always remember that a good wine should be swallowed slowly, a sip at a time. Also, know that though it is sweet to desire, it is sweeter still to be desired."

On this point Chrysothemis expressed ideas very different; whereupon Petronius expounded to her the distinction that ought to be drawn between a charioteer broken to the circus-ring and a tyro who for the first time ventures to drive a quadriga.

Turning to his nephew, he added:

"Try to gain your maiden's confidence. Put her in a good humour, and show yourself great of soul. I do not want to be present at a funeral supper. If need be, even swear that you will restore her to Pomponia. Upon you will it depend whether or not, by to-morrow, she is willing to remain here. For the last five years I have adopted this line of conduct with regard to that recalcitrant dove there"—he pointed to Chrysothemis—"and never have I had occasion to complain of her frowardness."

The young woman tapped him on the shoulder with her peacock-feather fan.

"Perhaps you will next say," she remarked, "that I have never resisted you?"

"Simply because of my predecessor."

"As also that you were never at my feet?"

"Only to put rings on them."

Involuntarily Chrysothemis glanced at her toes, which glittered with jewels, and then joined Petronius in a burst of laughter. As for Vinicius, he had not heard a word of all this. Under his robe of a Syrian priest his heart was beating irregularly.

"They must have left the palace by now," he said, as though to himself.

"Certainly," commented Petronius. "Would you rather that, while we are waiting, I either tell you of the prophecies of Apollonius of Tyana or finish the history of Rufinus?"

Vinicius felt little interested in Apollonius of Tyana, and even less in Rufinus, for all his thoughts were centred upon Lygia. Though he felt that it would be becoming for him to receive her at his house, he was beginning to regret that he had not, rather, gone to the palace, if it was only to see her the sooner, and to be able to sit by her side in the shadow of the litter.

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Presently some slaves entered with tripods, and threw upon their embers some sticks of nard and myrrh.

"By this time they must have reached the turning from the Carinæ."

"He will never be able to contain himself," cried Chrysothemis. "He will go to meet them, and probably miss the way."

Vinicius smiled bashfully.

"By no means," said he.

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"A groat for him as a philosopher!" he remarked. "Never of this son of Mars shall I be able to make a man."

But Vinicius had not heard him.

"They must be at the Carinæ by now," was his next remark.

As a matter of fact the procession was just turning round towards the Carinæ—the litter being preceded by torchbearers, and surrounded by pedisequii or lackeys, with Atacinus to superintend the whole. The cortège advanced but slowly, for in this unlighted city lanterns afforded sorry illumination. Moreover, though deserted near the palace, where only a few scattered individuals could be seen gliding about with lamps, the streets further away were unusually crowded. From every alley there kept issuing groups of three or four men, who, without torches, and clad in sombre garments, marched, some among the slaves surrounding the cortège, and others in more compact groups, in a direction opposite to that pursued by the procession. Some of these men staggered like drunkards, and progress was becoming momentarily so difficult that the torchbearers were forced to keep vociferating:

"Way there! Way for the noble tribune, Marcus Vinicius!"

Through the half-drawn curtains Lygia could see these dim groups of people, and her heart bounded alternately with hope and fear.

"It is he," she murmured with trembling lips. "It is Ursus and our Christians. They are going to act immediately. May Christ preserve and save us!"

Atacinus, who, at first, had paid no attention to this abnormal ferment, was now growing uneasy. More and more frequently were the torchbearers forced to repeat: "Way for the litter of the noble tribune!" At length the unknown individuals began to press so close to the litter that the freedman gave orders for them to be dispersed with clubs; whereupon a sudden tumult arose at

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the head of the procession, and in a moment every light had been extinguished.

Atacinus understood at last. The affair was a pre-concerted attack. He stood petrified with terror. Every one knew that Cæsar and his Augustans were accustomed to play nocturnal pranks in the Suburran and other quarters of the city, and that sometimes Cæsar reaped a harvest of bruises from these nocturnal expeditions. Nevertheless any one who defended himself, even though he were a senator, incurred death; and in spite of the fact that the guard-house of the watchmen whose duty it was to keep the peace lay only a little distance from the scene of these affrays, such officials were accustomed to become both blind and deaf. Around the litter there was now an impassable block of struggling, writhing, stamping humanity. Suddenly a light dawned upon Atacinus. At all costs he must recover Lygia, and leave his men to their fate. Dragging her from the litter, he seized her in his arms, and sought to escape under cover of darkness.

"Ursus, Ursus!" cried Lygia. In her white robe she was easily distinguishable, and Atacinus was putting out an arm to cover her with part of his mantle when a terrible grasp seized him by the back of the neck, his head resounded as under the blow of a club, and he sank forward like a felled ox.

For the most part the slaves also were lying prone upon the ground, or fleeing in various directions, and colliding with the angles of the walls. As for the litter, it had long ago been smashed to pieces in the tumult. Ursus had disappeared with Lygia in the direction of Suburra, and his companions had gone their several ways.

The slaves rallied before Vinicius' mansion, and took counsel together. They did not dare enter the house; so, after a short parley, they returned to the scene of the attack. There they found several corpses, and also the body of Atacinus. Though still breathing when discovered, he stiffened after a convulsive movement, and fell back motionless.

Taking with them the freedman's corpse, the slaves halted once more before Vinicius' mansion. The task now confronted them of having to tell their master what had happened.

"Let Gulo take him the news," cried several voices. "He, like ourselves, has blood upon his form, and our master loves him well. He will stand in less danger at our master's hands than will the rest of us."

So the German Gulo, an old slave who had served Vinicius since the childhood of the latter, and had been inherited by Vinicius from his mother, said to his companions:

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"Yes, *I* will go in and report this affair; but do you others come with me, that his anger may not fall upon me alone."

Meanwhile Vinicius had lost patience under the ridicule of Petronius and Chrysothemis. Striding violently up and down the atrium, he kept repeating:

"They ought to have been here by now, they ought to have been here by now!"

Then he tried to leave the house to meet the cortège, but was restrained from doing so. Suddenly footsteps sounded in the ante-room, and a crowd of slaves entered the atrium. Ranging themselves alongside the wall, they raised their hands, and groaned: "Ah! Aa-a-ah!"

Vinicius rushed in their direction.

"Where is Lygia?" he cried in a terrible voice.

Gulo advanced and exclaimed piteously:

"See this blood, my lord! We did our best to defend her. See this blood, my lord—see this blood!"

Further he did not get, for with a bronze candlestick Vinicius had fractured the man's skull. Then, seizing his head in his two hands, and digging his fingers into his hair, he exclaimed again and again: "Woe, woe is me!"

His face was livid, his glance demented, his mouth flecked with foam.

"Bring me the rods," he shouted in a voice that was scarcely human.

"Ah! Have pity upon us!" groaned the slaves.

Petronius rose with a look of disgust.

"Come, Chrysothemis," he said. "If you care to contemplate meat I will have a butcher's stall at the Carinæ taken for the purpose."

They left the room.

Behind them, in the garlanded house, in the house that had been decked ready for the banquet, the groaning of slaves and the whistling of rods lasted until morning.

XI

THAT night Vinicius could not betake himself to rest. When the groans of the flogged slaves failed to appease either his suffering or his fury he took to himself another band of men, and, later in the night, set out at their head to look for Lygia. He searched the Esquiline quarter, the Suburra, the Vicus Sceleratus, and the adjoining streets. Then, having made a tour of the Capitol, he crossed the bridge of Fabricius, traversed the island, and, finally, scoured the region across the Tiber. Yet it was a pursuit

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devoid of system, since even he had no hope of recovering Lygia. If he looked for her it was merely because he hoped thereby to fill the void of that terrible night.

It was dawn before he returned home—the hour when the mule-carts of the market-gardeners were beginning to make their appearance, and the bakers were just opening their shops. First of all he had Gulo's corpse removed—no one having dared, in the meanwhile, to touch it. Next he commanded that the slaves from whom Lygia had been seized should be sent to the rural prisons (this connoted a punishment as terrible as death). Lastly, he threw himself down upon a couch in the atrium, and plunged into a confused consideration of ways and means whereby he might again find Lygia, and capture her.

To renounce her, and definitely to lose her, appeared to him an impossibility. At the very thought of such a contingency his rage overwhelmed his love, since for the first time his imperious nature had come into collision with a hostile will. He would not, he could not, resign himself to his fate, for never had he desired anything so ardently as he now desired Lygia. He felt that he could not live without her—he could not imagine how he should get through the morrow and the following days. At times, also, he was conscious of a resentment against her that amounted almost to madness. He wanted her, even if it was only to beat her, to drag her by the hair to his cubiculum, to torture her.

Next, a terrible longing for that voice, for those eyes, for that figure, gathered in him, and he felt as though he could grovel at her feet. He called to her, he gnawed his fists, he pressed his hands to his head. Then with all the power of his will he forced himself to think quietly of means of abducting her, yet could not. Thousands of methods and thousands of stratagems presented themselves to his mind, yet all seemed absurd. At last an idea came to him—namely, that it must be Aulus who had seized her. In any case, Aulus, more than any one else, must be aware where she was lying hidden.

Upon that he leapt to his feet to betake himself to the Aulus mansion. Should the Auluses not surrender her, should they pay no heed to his threats, he would go straight to Cæsar himself, and denounce the old general for disobeying an imperial command, and obtain a death warrant against him. But first of all he would wring from him Lygia's place of refuge. And even if Aulus gave her up of his own free will, he would be avenged upon him. True, the Auluses had received him into their house, and tended him in sickness; but that did not matter. He, Vinicius,

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felt absolved from any obligation of gratitude in that respect. His vindictive, ferocious soul simply revelled in the thought of Pomponia's despair at the moment when the centurion should bring Aulus his sentence of death. Vinicius had but little doubt that he could obtain that sentence, for Petronius would help him, and Cæsar never refused a request to one of his boon companions.

Suddenly a terrible supposition almost caused Vinicius' heart to stop beating.

"Suppose it were Cæsar himself who has abducted Lygia?"

Every one knew that Cæsar often sought in nocturnal raids a solace for his ennui, and that Petronius took part in these exploits—their principal purpose being to capture comely damsels, and to toss them in a soldier's coat until they fainted. Nero was accustomed to call these expeditions "fishing for pearls," for sometimes he contrived to catch a pearl of great youth and beauty, who would thereupon be sent either to the Palatine or to one of Nero's innumerable villas, provided that he did not cede her to an intimate of his. Just such an occurrence might have befallen Lygia. Cæsar had looked at her at the banquet, and Vinicius felt sure that she must have infatuated him. Of course, Cæsar *might* have had her taken back to the palace; but, as Petronius had said, the Emperor lacked the courage of his crimes. Moreover, he stood in awe of Poppæa.

Next, Vinicius reflected that it was unlikely that Aulus and Pomponia would have dared to retake a woman whom Cæsar had once given to him, Vinicius. Indeed, *who* would have dared to do such a thing? Could it have been the gigantic Lygian with the eyes of blue, who already had had the temerity to enter the banqueting-hall, and to carry away Lygia in his arms? No; no one except Cæsar could be to blame.

If it was so, then Lygia was lost to him for ever. From any other hands could she have been wrenched, but not from those. At length Vinicius understood how dear to him she had become. Like a drowning man who, in a single moment, remembers all his past, did Vinicius now remember Lygia. He could see her, he could hear every word that she had ever uttered. He could see her near the fountain, in the Auluses' house, and at the banquet. He could feel her near him, he could scent the perfume of her hair, he could feel the warmth of her body and the deliciousness of the kisses that, at the banquet, he had pressed upon her innocent lips. A thousand times more beautiful and more desirable and more gentle did she appear to him than the most unique either of gods or mortals. And to think

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that Nero had got her caused him a physical pain so terrible that he could have beaten his head against the walls of the atrium. He realised that, should vengeance be impossible for him, he could and would go mad; and, just as, before, it had seemed to him that he could not live unless he again found her, so now he determined that he would not die before he had wreaked retribution.

The mere thought of vengeance gave him comfort. "I will be your Cassius Chærea!" he kept on repeating. Then he took a little earth from the flower-pots around the impluvium, and swore by Hecate, Erebus, and his household gods that he would get even with Nero. That done, he had at least a reason for living. He set out for the Palatine, with the intention, as a first step, of seeing Acte, since she might be able to tell him something.

On the way he thought confusedly of Lygia and of his vengeance. Among other things, he had heard that the priests of the Egyptian goddess Pasht could bring about maladies in persons; wherefore he determined to consult them. Also, in the East he had learnt that the Jews possessed magic formulæ whereby the bodies of their enemies could be covered with ulcers; and among his slaves there were a score or more of Jews. Very well: he would have the secret flogged out of them.

Before the arch of the palace entrance he said to himself that, should the prætorian guards offer him the least opposition, or seek to satisfy themselves that he had come unarmed (as a matter of fact he had forgotten to bring any weapons with him), that could be taken as a proof that Lygia was in the palace by Cæsar's will.

However, the senior centurion only smiled at him in friendly fashion as he approached.

"Hail, noble tribune!" he said. "If you wish to pay your respects to Cæsar you have come at an unfortunate hour, and I doubt that you can see him."

"What has happened?" asked Vinicius.

"The august infant has just been taken ill. Both Cæsar and Augusta are with her, as also are the physicians."

This was a grave event. On the birth of his little daughter Cæsar had gone into raptures of joy, and the Senate had recommended Poppæa's breasts to the special protection of the gods. Also, a grand purificatory rite had been celebrated at Antium, at which splendid games had been held, and a temple founded to the two Fortunæ. Nero, who could be moderate in nothing, loved the child to distraction, while to Poppæa also the child was dear, in that it had strengthened her position, and rendered her influence invincible.

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Upon the health, therefore, and the life of the infant Augusta the fate of the Empire depended. But Vinicius was so entirely preoccupied with his love for Lygia that he paid no heed to the soldier's reply.

"I wish to see Acte," he said, and entered the palace.

Acte also was with the child, and he had to wait. In fact it was nearly noon when she appeared.

"Acte," cried Vinicius as he seized her hand and drew her towards the centre of the room, "where is Lygia?"

"That is what I was about to ask *you*," she replied reproachfully; whereupon, though he had been resolved to question the woman calmly, he cried with a face convulsed with grief and rage:

"I have not got her. She was abducted on the way to my house."

Then, recovering himself, he thrust his face close to Acte's, and said through his clenched teeth:

"Acte, if you hold life dear, if you do not wish to bring about misfortunes of which you cannot foresee the extent, tell me truly: is Cæsar the man who has abducted her?"

"Cæsar never once left the palace yesterday."

"Swear to me by the shade of your mother, as well as by all the gods, that Lygia is not in the palace."

"By the shade of my mother, Marcus, she is not here; nor is it Cæsar who has carried her off. Since yesterday the child Augusta has been ill, and Nero has never once quitted the cradle."

Vinicius drew a deep breath.

"Then," said he as he sank upon a bench and clenched his fists, "it must be the Auluses—and woe betide them!"

"Aulus Plautius has been here this morning. Myself he could not see, for I was with the child, but he questioned Epaphrodite and others, and told them that he would return to question me later."

"He was merely trying to avert suspicion. If he had not known what had become of her he would have gone to look for her at my house."

"Well, he left me a few words written on a tablet. Knowing that Lygia had been removed from his mansion by your and Petronius' desire, he had been expecting her to be sent to you, and therefore called at your house this morning—only to be told by your people what had happened."

This said, Acte went into her cubiculum, and returned thence with the tablet which Aulus had left behind him.

Vinicius read the missive, and remained silent, while Acte endeavoured to read his thoughts in his downcast face. At length she said:

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"No, Marcus. What has happened has happened by the will of Lygia herself."

"Then you *knew* that she was going to flee?" exclaimed Vinicius.

"I merely knew that she would never consent to become your concubine." Acte's eyes had in them an expression almost stern.

"But what have *you* been all your life?"

"I? I have been a slave."

Vinicius' fury was by no means spent. Cæsar had made him a gift of Lygia, and he would find her even if she were hidden under ground. Yes, he would make of her what he wished. She should be his concubine. He would have her beaten as often as he might think good. When he was tired of her he would give her to his lowest slave, or else harness her to a hand-mill on one of his African estates.

To tell the truth, he had lost his wits, and, as Acte clearly perceived, was no longer able to make his words coincide with reality.

"Lygia has rebelled against Cæsar's authority," he said. "I will petition Cæsar to have her looked for throughout the city and the Empire, even if it should be necessary to employ every legion for the purpose. Petronius shall back my demand, and the search shall commence this very day."

To this Acte replied impatiently:

"Take care lest the day when Cæsar finds her prove the day when you lose her for ever."

"What do you say?"

"Listen, Marcus. Yesterday, when in the gardens, Lygia and I encountered Poppæa and the child, which was being carried in the arms of Lilith, the negress. Last night the child fell ill, and Lilith avers that the stranger maiden must have cast a spell over the infant. Should the child recover, the matter will be forgotten; but, otherwise, Poppæa will be the first to accuse Lygia of sorcery, and then, if Lygia should be recaptured, her life will not be worth a groat."

A silence ensued. Then Vinicius hazarded:

"Perhaps Lygia *did* cast a spell over the child—and over myself as well?"

"Lilith declares that the child began to weep as soon as ever the party left us: and it is true—the child *did* begin to weep then. Doubtless she was already ill. Look for Lygia if you like, Marcus; but until the child be restored to health do not mention Lygia's name. Her eyes have shed sufficient tears already, and all through your fault."

"Do you love her, Acte?" Vinicius inquired sadly.

"Yes; I have *learnt* to love her."

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"You love her; yet she has not rendered you hatred for your love, as she has done to me."

"Blind, headstrong man! At all events she *did* love you."

Vinicius sprang to his feet.

"It is not true!" he cried. "Lygia hates me. How can you know otherwise? After only a day's intimacy, would a girl like Lygia avow love for any man? And what sort of love would it be that prefers a wandering life and poverty and uncertainty and, perhaps, a miserable death to a life of luxury and joy? Aye, what sort of love would it be that fears pleasure and is hungry for suffering? True, there *was* a day at the Auluses' house when I thought that she loved me; but already she was hating me, and is hating me now, and will die with that hatred in her heart."

Acte, generally so gentle, lost her temper.

"How have you tried to win her?" she exclaimed. "Instead of respectfully asking her at the hands of Aulus and Pomponia, you have had her removed from them. Moreover, it is not your wife that you wished to make her, but your concubine—yes, her, a king's daughter! Again, you went and sullied her innocent eyes with the spectacle of an orgy. Had you forgotten what the house of Aulus is like, and who is Pomponia, Lygia's adoptive mother? I presume you never dreamt that she and Lygia could in any way differ from Nigidia and Calvia Crispinilla and Poppæa and the other women whom you meet in Cæsar's palace? You never understood that this pure-minded child might well prefer death to dishonour? Do you know the God whom she adores, or whether her god is not better and purer than the infamous Venus or the Isis whom the shamelessness of the Romans has elevated into a divinity? No; Lygia has never made an actual avowal of her love for you; but she *has* told me that she tended you when you were sick, and when she spoke of you she blushed. Her heart did once beat for you, but you have frightened it, outraged it, offended it."

"Then it is too late," he groaned. He knew not what to do, or what to undertake, or what to set about. Like an echo Acte kept repeating, "Too late, too late!" and the words, coming as they did from another mouth than his own, sounded like a sentence of death.

He was about to withdraw without taking leave of Acte when the curtain at the door of the atrium was suddenly raised, and Vinicius saw before him the sombrely-clad figure of Pomponia.

She too had learnt of Lygia's disappearance, and, believing that she could gain Acte's apartments more easily than could Aulus, had come to ask for news. On perceiving

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Vinicius, she turned to him with a face that looked white and frail.

"Marcus," she said, "may God pardon you the wrong which you have done to us and to Lygia!"

Vinicius stood there with bent head, filled with a sense of misfortune and responsibility, yet powerless to understand what god could or might pardon him, or why Pomponia spoke to him of forgiveness when she might well have spoken of vengeance. At length he left the room with his brain clouded with thought, yet empty of hope.

In the Court of Honour and under the gallery anxious groups had gathered—groups of senators and knights who had come to hear news of the little Augusta, or at least to show their concern in the matter, even if it were only for the benefit of the Imperial slaves. Indeed, the tidings of the illness of the young "divinity" had spread with great swiftness, and through the gates a fresh stream of callers kept filtering, while behind the arch was massed the populace. Some of the new arrivals, on catching sight of Vinicius, approached him in quest of news, but he walked on without answering. Suddenly he came to a halt before Petronius.

Against the man whose strategy had had such disastrous consequences Vinicius would have let loose the full tide of his fury, had not he (Vinicius) left Acte's rooms in such a downcast mood that his native choler was in abeyance. Nevertheless he repulsed Petronius, and tried to pass him, but the other seized him by the arm.

"How goes the little divinity?" he said.

Obliged to stop, Vinicius flared up afresh.

"May all the infernal gods swallow her!" he replied with clenched teeth. "Yes, her, and this house with her!"

"Silence, you fool!" ejaculated Petronius, with a furtive glance around him. Then he added quickly:

"If you wish to know anything about Lygia, come with me. No, it is useless—I intend to say nothing here. Come with me, and I will impart to you what I suppose."

Throwing his arm around Vinicius, he dragged him away. Indeed, to get him out of the palace was his principal concern, for he had no news to give him. He felt a certain responsibility for the events which had undone Vinicius, and had already set on foot a scheme. Once in the litter, he said:

"I have set my slaves to guard every gate of the city, and given them an exact description both of the young girl and of the giant who carried her off from the banqueting-hall the other night. Undoubtedly it was he too who carried her off yesterday. Listen. Perhaps the Auluses will try to conceal her at one of their country houses, and in that case we shall know the direction that she will take;

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but if my people do not sight her at the gates, it will be a proof that she has remained in the city, and we can then begin our search to-day."

"But even the Auluses do not know where she is," objected Vinicius.

"Are you certain of that?"

"Yes. I have just seen Pomponia. They too are looking for her."

"Well, she could not have left the city yesterday, for at night all the gates are shut. Moreover, two of my fellows are on guard at each gate. One of them has instructions to follow Lygia and the giant if they should be sighted, while the other one is to return immediately and give the alarm. If she is in the city we shall find her, for it will be easy enough to recognise the figure and shoulders of the Lygian. It is quite possible that Cæsar has *not* been the abductor. In fact, I can assure you he has not. The Palatine has no secrets from me."

Upon that Vinicius, in a voice stifled with emotion, told Petronius what Acte had said to him concerning the new dangers which now threatened Lygia. Then he plunged into recrimination. But for Petronius, said he, Lygia would have been at home at the Auluses', where he, Vinicius, could have seen her every day, and have been happier even than Cæsar. The speaker's excitement rose as he talked, until his feelings had so mastered him that tears of anger and disappointment gushed from his eyes.

Petronius had never conceived that the young man was capable of loving so desperately.

"O omnipotent Lady of Cyprus," he said to himself, "you alone hold sway over the hearts of gods and of men."

XII

WHEN they descended from the litter at Petronius' house the keeper of the atrium informed them that none of the slaves who had been sent to the city gates had yet returned.

"I was right, then," said Petronius. "Incontestably the party are still within the city walls, and we shall find them. Do you send also your slaves to guard the gates—more particularly slaves whom you have previously sent on errands to the palace, since they will the more easily recognise Lygia."

"I have given orders for my slaves to be sent to the country prisons, but I will give other instructions, and to the gates they shall go."

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The necessary instructions having been issued, the pair passed into the inner peristylum, and seated themselves upon a marble bench. The golden-haired Eunice and Iras hastened to put bronze footstools under their feet, and to pour out wine from long-necked amphoræ which had come from Volaterra or Cæcina.

"Have you any slave who knows the Lygian giant by sight?" asked Petronius.

"Both Atacinus and Gulo *used* to know him, but Atacinus fell last night and Gulo I have killed with my own hand."

"That is a pity," remarked Petronius, "for Gulo had carried both you and myself in his arms as babes."

"Yes. I was going to have given him his freedom. But no matter. Let us speak of Lygia. Rome is a sea—"

"A sea in which one fishes for pearls. It is more than probable that, though we may not find her either to-day or to-morrow, we *shall* find her in the end. You accuse me of having suggested to you an unfortunate course of action; but the course was a good one, and has only by chance turned out badly. Aulus himself has informed you that he is thinking of transferring himself and his family to Italy; and if that had come about, she would have been far away by now."

"But I should have followed her," replied Vinicius. "Also, in any case she would have been safe and sound; whereas now, should the Imperial infant die, Poppæa will believe that it was Lygia's fault, as well as convince Cæsar of the same."

"Ah well, the little brat may recover; and even if it does not we shall find some other excuse for the circumstance," Petronius reflected a moment.

"It is said that Poppæa professes the religion of the Jews," he continued, "as also that she believes in spirits. Cæsar too is superstitious. If we start the fable that it is evil spirits who have carried off Lygia the story will be believed, and the more so since the manner of her carrying off has certainly been mysterious. In any case it has been the work neither of Cæsar nor of Aulus. Yet the Lygian can hardly have done it alone. Was he helped by any one? Could a mere slave have recruited so many men in a single day?"

"Everywhere in the city the slaves help one another."

"Then some day they will pay for it in a rather sanguinary fashion. But you are right; they *do* help one another. Yet in the present case it would have been slaves fighting slaves. How improbable! Is it likely that they would have abducted Lygia when they knew full well that the responsibility and punishment for such an enterprise

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would recoil upon other slaves—that is to say, upon others of their own kind? On the other hand, you will only have to ask one of your men whether he has not seen Lygia flying aloft in company with an escort of spirits, and he will swear to you by the shield of Jupiter that he really *has* beheld such a spectacle.”

Vinicius was not yet wholly emancipated from superstition. He looked at Petronius uneasily, and said:

“If Ursus has not abducted her by his own unaided efforts, nor yet raised a sufficient band of men to help him, who, do you suppose, did carry her off?”

Petronius burst out laughing.

“You see!” he said. “Our world, which makes sport of the gods, will yet believe anything that is told it, even as you yourself do to a certain extent. What we tell the world it will take for the genuine truth, and so cease to look for Lygia. Meanwhile you and I will take up our abode at a distance, in one of our villas.”

“Who, then, came to her assistance?”

“Her co-religionists.”

“Her co-religionists? What gods does she worship? I ought to have known them better than you can do, yet I am ignorant on the point.”

“There is scarcely a woman in Rome who has not her own peculiar gods. Evidently Pomponia has brought up Lygia in the worship of the divinity whom she herself adores. What cult is it, do you ask? I do not know. But one thing is certain; and that is, that she has never been seen to offer sacrifice to any of *our* gods. She has even been accused of being a Christian, but that can hardly be possible. Moreover, a tribunal composed of her own family acquitted her of the charge. Of the Christians it is said that they worship an ass’s head, that they are the enemies of the human race, and that they commit the most infamous crimes. Consequently Pomponia cannot be a Christian. Moreover, her virtue is notorious. Nor would an enemy of the human race treat slaves as she does hers.”

“No; nowhere else are they treated so well.”

“In any case I have heard Pomponia speak of a god who is one, omnipotent, and all-pitying. Apparently she has buried our other gods, but that is her own affair. Remains it that her Logos would be a very feeble Omnipotence if it had as devotees only herself and Lygia, with Ursus as an understudy; wherefore it follows that the devotees of that god must form a very considerable number, and it is *they* who have helped Lygia.”

“Their religion is a religion which enjoins forgiveness,” said Vinicius. “When, just now, I met Pomponia in Acte’s

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rooms she said to me : ' God pardon you for the wrong which you have done to ourselves and to Lygia ! ' "

" One would feel inclined to believe that their god is a protector of great benevolence. If, then, he is so ready to pardon you, let him, as a sign thereof, restore you the maiden."

" For myself, I would offer him a hecatomb to-morrow if he would restore me Lygia. At present I can neither eat nor take a bath nor sleep. I am going to clothe myself in a dark mantle, and perambulate the city. Perhaps, thus disguised, I shall find her. I feel perfectly ill."

Petronius looked at him with compassion. Certainly Vinicius' eyes were ringed about, and his brilliant pupils feverish, while a two-days' beard had covered his prominent chin with a dark fringe of hair, and his locks were much dishevelled. Truly he appeared far from well. Iras and Eunice also glanced at him with an air of pity. Nevertheless, like Petronius, Vinicius paid them even less attention than he did the little dogs which were gambolling around him.

" It is fever that is troubling you," said Petronius.

" In good truth, yes."

" Then listen to me. I do not know what a physician would prescribe for you, but I *do* know how I should act in your place. Until the one woman be found I should look around me for another to act as a temporary substitute. In your villa have I seen several choice figures of maidens. It is useless to deny it. Yes, of course I know what love is, and that if one desires a certain woman no other one can adequately take her place; yet in the person of a beautiful slave you might find at least a *passing* distraction."

" No, I do not want to," replied Vinicius.

" Perhaps your own slaves have not the attraction of novelty," continued Petronius after a moment's benevolent reflection; " but"—and here he scanned Eunice and Iras, afterwards laying his hand upon the hip of the flax-haired Acheian woman—" just look for a moment at these maidens here before you. Only a few days ago young Fonteius Capito offered me, for this one in particular, three marvellous boys of Clazomene, saying that Scopas himself never created more perfect forms. How I have contrived to remain insensible to Eunice's charms I do not know, but at least it has not been the thought of Chrysothemis that has restrained me. Well, you can have Eunice, so take her."

The slave turned pale as, fixing her eyes nervously upon Vinicius, she awaited his reply.

Pressing his hands to his temples, Vinicius burst out rapidly, like a man who is ill and obsessed with something:

" No, no! I do not want her, nor do I want any one!

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I thank you, but I have no desire for her. I am going to search the city for Lygia. Give me a hooded Gallic mantle, for I am about to scour the other bank of the river. If only I could get a sight of Ursus!" And he rushed from the room.

Petronius did not attempt to detain him, but took Vinicius' refusal as a mere momentary dislike for any woman who was not Lygia, and therefore turned to Eunice with a resolve that his generosity should not have been offered in vain.

"Eunice," he said, "take a bath, and perfume your body, and then go to Vinicius' house."

Hearing this, the slave fell upon her knees, and besought Petronius not to send her away from his house. She would not, she said, go to Vinicius. She would rather be his (Petronius') wood-carrier than the chief of Vinicius' staff. No, she would not go—she could not. Again and again did she beg her master to have pity upon her. Let him beat her daily rather than dismiss her.

Petronius listened in amazement to the slave who dared to dispute an order, and to say "I cannot, I will not." It was a thing so unprecedented in Rome that at first he thought he could not have heard aright. Then he frowned. He was too fastidious to be cruel, and in his house the slaves were freer than they were elsewhere; but this had only been on condition that they performed their service in exemplary fashion, and revered the will of their master as if it were the will of the gods. Should they fail in these two obligations, Petronius was capable of punishing his slaves in the manner to which custom had rendered them subject. And, moreover, never at any time could he brook contradiction. For a moment he looked at the kneeling woman and her tears, and then said:

"Go and call Teiresias."

She returned with the Cretan whose office it was to superintend the atrium.

"Take Eunice," said Petronius, "and give her twenty-five strokes with the rod; but not with such force as to injure her skin."

Then he passed into his library, seated himself at a table of red marble, and set to work upon his "Banquet of Trimalcio."

Nevertheless Lygia's flight and the illness of the little Augusta were too much present to his mind to permit of his writing for long. Above all, the illness referred to was a matter of importance. If Cæsar should ever become persuaded that Lygia had cast a spell over the child, Petronius might find himself in an awkward position, since it was at his request that the young girl had been summoned to the palace. However, he would take the first oppor-

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tunity of explaining to Cæsar the absurdity of the accusation. Also, he could rely upon a weakness which Poppæa had for himself—a weakness which she had not so well concealed but that he had remarked it. Shrugging his shoulders at his apprehensions, he decided, first of all, to have dinner, and then to repair to the palace, thence to the Campus Martius, and, lastly, to Chrysothemis' abode.

As he entered the triclinium he noticed, standing among the other slaves who were stationed at the servants' entrance, the slender form of Eunice; and, remembering that he had given orders to Teiresias to have her whipped, he frowned, and looked around him for that servitor. Not perceiving him, he asked Eunice whether she had yet received her punishment; whereupon she threw herself at his feet, and kissed the hem of his toga.

"Yes, my lord," she said. "*I have* received the strokes."

Her voice had in it a note both of joy and of gratitude. Evidently she thought that the fact of her having been flogged implied that she was going to be allowed to remain in the house. Petronius perceived this, and was astonished at her strenuous resistance; yet also he was too fine a connoisseur of the human soul not to divine that only love could have been the cause of such obstinacy.

"You have a lover here?" he said.

Eunice raised her blue, tear-filled eyes, and replied in a voice that was scarcely articulate:

"Yes, my lord."

At that moment her eyes, her golden hair, and her agitated face looked so beautiful that Petronius felt smitten with a kind of sympathy for her.

"Who is your lover?" he inquired with a gesture of his hand in the direction of the remaining slaves.

No reply followed. Eunice only bent her head to her master's feet, and remained thus without moving.

Petronius glanced at his male slaves, several of whom were exceedingly handsome; but on no single face could he read a sign of self-consciousness, though all were smiling warily. Next he looked at the prostrate Eunice. Lastly he entered the triclinium without saying anything further.

After the meal he set out in his litter for the palace; whence he went to Chrysothemis' house, and remained there until a late hour. On his return to his own mansion he inquired of Teiresias whether Eunice had yet been given her whipping.

"Yes, my lord," replied that functionary; "but you told me not to injure her skin."

"And did I not give you any other order on the subject?"

"No, my lord," replied Teiresias uneasily.

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" Good. Which of the slaves is her lover ? "

" None of them, my lord."

" Then what know you about her ? "

To this Teiresias replied with some diffidence:

" Never at night does Eunice leave the cubiculum where she sleeps with old Acrisio and with Ifis. Nor, after your bath, my lord, does she ever resort to the hot-room. The other women laugh at her, and have dubbed her Diana."

" Enough," said Petronius. " My nephew, Vinicius, to whom this morning I presented her, has not accepted her; so she will remain here. You can withdraw."

" May I say another word concerning Eunice, my lord ? "

" I have told you to acquaint me with all that you know."

" Then let me tell you this, my lord. The entire staff of servants is talking of the flight of this young maiden who was to have gone to live with the noble Vinicius; and, after your departure, Eunice came to me to say that she knows a man who could find the maiden."

" Ah! " said Petronius. " Who is this man ? "

" I do not know, my lord."

" Good. To-morrow let the man be here to meet the tribune; whom you will beg, in my name, to attend early."

Left alone, Petronius involuntarily began to think of Eunice. That the young slave should desire Lygia to be found appeared to him quite natural, for evidently she had no desire to replace her in Vinicius' establishment; but presently a further idea occurred to him that the man to whom she had referred must be her lover; and somehow Petronius did not relish the thought. Yet there was a very simple means of finding out the truth. Let Eunice herself be summoned.

The hour was now late, and Petronius had paid Chrysothemis a long visit, and was fully ready for sleep. As he passed to his cubiculum he, for some reason or another, remembered that on Chrysothemis' splendid face he had, that evening, discerned some crow's feet. Also, he told himself that her beauty was famous rather than authentic, and that Fonteius Capito, who had offered him three young boys of Clazomene in exchange for Eunice, loved a good bargain.

XIII

PETRONIUS had scarcely finished dressing in the unctorium when Vinicius arrived in response to Teiresias' message. The young man had sent his servants to scour every road leading to the provinces, as well as to visit every outpost

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with an exact description of Ursus and Lygia, added to an offer of a reward for their capture as "fugitive slaves." Yet he had his doubts as to whether this pursuit would overtake them, as well as whether, even if it did so, the rural authorities would agree to arrest the runaways merely on the private order of Vinicius—a person not recommended to them by the Prætor. Nor had there been time to procure such a recommendation. Also, Vinicius, dressed as a slave, had sought Lygia during the whole of the preceding day. Yet of her he had found not the least trace, not the smallest possible indication.

Furthermore, he had seen some of Aulus' servants, who had seemed to be bound on a similar quest; and this had confirmed in him the supposition that the Aulus family themselves did not know where Lygia was.

When, however, Teiresias had come to inform him that a certain man unknown would do what he could to discover the fugitives, Vinicius had run at full speed to Petronius' house, where, after a few words of greeting, he plunged into a torrent of questions.

"Teiresias," replied Petronius, "was merely referring to some one who might be useful in the search. Presently Eunice, who knows the some one in question, will be here to fold my toga, and then she can give us fuller information."

"Eunice? Is that the girl whom yesterday you wanted to give me?"

"Yes; and whom you refused—for which I thank you, seeing that she is the best toga-folder in Rome."

The folder of togas in question entered almost immediately. Unwrapping one of those garments, she betook herself to her task of draping it over Petronius' shoulders; and as she did so her countenance looked radiant, and her eyes beamed with smiles. Petronius glanced at her. Certainly she was very comely. When the toga had been arranged she pleated it into folds; and as she stooped, the better to pull them into place, he saw that her arms were the colour of a pale pink carnation, and that her throat seemed to be made of mother-of-pearl.

"Eunice," he said, "has the man yet come of whom you spoke to Teiresias yesterday?"

"Yes, my lord."

"And his name is—?"

"Is Chilo Chilonides, my lord."

"And his profession?"

"He is a physician, a sage, and a storyteller—a man who can read and predict human destiny."

"Has he predicted *your* destiny?"

Eunice blushed to the very nape of her neck.

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"Yes, my lord."

"And what said he?"

"He predicted for me both suffering and happiness."

"Well, the suffering has come through the hand of Teiresias, and the happiness is still to arrive."

"It has arrived already, my lord."

"How so?"

"I am remaining here," murmured Eunice.

Petronius laid his hand upon her flaxen head.

"You have fashioned the folds of my toga well," he said, "and I am satisfied with you."

At the touch of his hand Eunice's eyes grew dim, and her throat heaved.

Presently Petronius and Vinicius passed into the atrium, where Chilo Chilonides greeted them with a profound obeisance. The sight of him caused Petronius to smile at the supposition that the man could have been Eunice's lover. The individual who stood before them could scarcely be *any one's* lover, for he had a personality which combined with abject servility a spice of the ridiculous. Though not an old man, his dishevelled beard and grizzled locks numbered but a few scattered grey hairs, while his paunch was hollow, and his shoulders so bent that at the first glance he looked like a hunchback. Above his shoulders there hung an enormous head, the face of which, with its piercing gaze, had something in its expression both of the fox and of the ape. Pimples spotted his bilious-tinted skin, and stood in ridges upon a nose that liquor had coloured purple, while the fact that he was either a real or a pretended miser showed itself in his dingy garments, which consisted only of a tunic and a mantle of goatskin. In short, his aspect reminded Petronius of Homer's Thersites. Answering the man's salute with a gesture, the master of the house said:

"Hail, divine Thersites. What of the hump that the divine Ulysses bestowed upon you under the walls of Troy? And how fares Ulysses himself in the Elysian Fields?"

"Most noble lord," replied Chilo Chilonides, "I have this to say: that Ulysses, the wisest among the dead, sends to Petronius, the wisest among the living, greeting, together with a request that you will cover my hump with a new coat."

"By the triple Hecate," cried Petronius, "that answer alone should be worth the coat!"

At this point the conversation was interrupted by Vinicius, who asked the man outright:

"Do you know precisely the commission which you are seeking to undertake?"

Quo Vadis

"When," replied Chilo, "two households, in two noble mansions, are talking of nothing else, and half Rome is repeating what they say, it is not difficult to divine what the matter in hand is. The night before last there took place the abduction of a young girl called Lygia, or, rather, of Callina, the adopted daughter of Aulus Plautius. Your slaves, my lord Vinicius, were escorting her from Cæsar's palace to your own mansion. My business, therefore, is to discover her if she be still in the city, or, should she have left it (which, of the two, is the more probable), to point out to you, noble tribune, the place whither she has fled for refuge."

"Good," said Vinicius, whom the conciseness of the reply had pleased. "And what means have you of carrying out what you undertake?"

Chilo smiled maliciously.

"The means," he replied, "lie at your own discretion, my lord. For myself, I possess but the necessary mental power."

Petronius smiled, for his guest satisfied him.

"The man will find her," he remarked.

But Vinicius had a frown on his brows.

"If, you wretch," he said, "this should prove to be a trick to get money out of me, I will have you clubbed to death."

"My lord," rejoined Chilo, "I am a philosopher; and a philosopher is never greedy for gain, especially when the gain is represented by what you have just so magnanimously revealed to me."

"You are a philosopher?" remarked Petronius. "Eunice told me you were only a physician and a diviner. How did you get to know Eunice?"

"She came to consult me, in consequence of my fame having reached her ears."

"To consult you in what way?"

"To consult me on a matter of love, my lord. She wished to be cured of an affection that was not returned."

"And *have* you cured her?"

"I have done more than that, my lord. I have given her an amulet which can engender a reciprocal attachment. At Paphos, in the island of Cyprus, there is a temple containing Venus' girdle. Of that girdle I gave Eunice a couple of strands, enclosed in an almond shell."

"For which you made her pay generously?"

"A reciprocal attachment cannot be too generously paid for. For myself, I lack two fingers of my right hand, and am therefore stinting myself in order to be able to hire a scribe to record my doctrine, and to transmit it to posterity."

"To what school do you belong, O heaven-born sage?"

"I am a Cynic, my lord, the better to match my tattered coat. I am also a Stoic, in that I bear my misery patiently. I

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am also a Peripatetic, for the reason that, possessing no litter, I wander on foot from tavern to tavern, and benefit, with my information, any one who is willing to pay for my liquor."

"And in the presence of the liquor you become also a Rhetorician?"

"Heraclites has said that everything is fluid; and no one could deny, my lord, that wine also comes under that description."

"In addition, Heraclites has said that fire is a divinity. It must be in honour of that divinity that your nose kindles altars."

"But again, the heaven-born Diogenes of Apollonius has said that air is the essence of all things, and that, the hotter the air be, the more perfect are the beings whom it sustains—the hottest air of all giving birth to the souls of sages. Since, therefore, in autumn the weather begins to cool, it becomes necessary for the true sage to rewarm his soul with wine. You could scarcely deny that a pitcher even of Capuan or of Telesian liquor may serve to heat the framework of our perishable surroundings?"

"Chilo Chilonides, what is your country?"

"It is near the Pontus Euxinus. I come from Mesembria."

"You are a great man, Chilo."

"And a misunderstood one," added the other despondently.

Vinicius was again growing impatient. He had had a ray of hope vouchsafed him, and would gladly have seen Chilo get to business without delay. All this dialogue seemed to him a waste of time, and he felt furious with Petronius.

"When are you going to begin your search?" he said to the Greek.

"I have begun it already, my lord. Even while standing here and answering your amiable questions, I am continuing it. Have faith in me, noble tribune, and rest assured that, were you to lose even a shoe-lace, I should know how to find it again, or at least to find the man who had picked it up in the street."

"Perhaps you have been employed on a similar quest before?" asked Petronius.

The Greek raised his eyes.

"To-day," he remarked, "are wisdom and virtue so esteemed that even a philosopher may be forced to seek other means of subsistence."

"What *are* your means?"

"Knowledge of everything that happens, and the offering of my services to all who need them."

"And do you get paid for so doing?"

"Ah, my lord, I stand in need of a hired scribe. Otherwise my wisdom will perish with me."

Quo Vadis

' If you have not yet succeeded in finding the money to buy a presentable coat, it follows that your merits have never yet been sufficiently recognised."

" The truth is that my native modesty will not permit me to parade them. Pray remember, my lord, that the patrons who once were numerous, and would dower a man of merit with gold as readily as they would swallow a Puteolan oyster, have become mere myths. It is not my merits that are wanting, but human gratitude. When a valuable slave escapes, who is it that finds the slave, if it be not the son of my father? When suddenly the walls of Rome bristle with inscriptions that are too laudatory even for the taste of the divine Poppæa, who is it that points out the culprits? Who is it that ransacks the bookstalls for verses directed against Cæsar? Who is it that reports what is being said in the houses of knights and of senators? Who is it that conveys letters too important to be entrusted to the hands of slaves, that listens to the proposals of the barbers of Rome, that receives the confidences of tavern-keepers and of bakers' assistants, that wins the goodwill of slaves, and that divines all that passes in a given house, from the atrium to the garden? Who is it that knows every street, every blind alley, every cul-de-sac, every hiding-place? Who is it that knows what is being discussed in the hot-rooms of baths, in the Circus, in the shops, in the schools for gladiators, in the booths of the slave market, and even in the brothels? "

" By the gods, but you have said enough, illustrious sage! " cried Petronius. " Now shall we be fairly submerged beneath the billows of your merit, sagacity, and virtue! Enough! We wished but to know who you are. We know now."

Vinicius too was satisfied, for he told himself that a man of this kind, when once laid to the trail, would, like a blood-hound, never swerve from it until he had tracked down his quarry.

" Very good," said the young tribune. " Do you need any guidance? "

" I need only weapons."

" What weapons? " inquired Vinicius in some astonishment.

For answer the Greek opened the palm of his hand, and in dumb show counted out some money.

" The times are bad," he added with a sigh.

" Then you are going to be like the ass which stormed the fortress with the aid of money-sacks? "

" I am only a poor philosopher," replied the other humbly. " It is you, my lord, who are carrying the gold."

Quo Vadis

Vinicius threw him a purse, which the man caught with the three fingers of his right hand. Then he raised his head, and continued:

"My lord, I know more of this than you suppose. I have not come hither with empty hands. For instance, it is within my knowledge that the Auluses are not responsible for the abduction of this maiden. That I have gleaned from their slaves. Also I know that she is not at the Palatine, where every one is concerned with the little Augusta. No; her escape was organised by a serving-man who hails from the same country as herself. Yet, since slaves hold together, and could never have been instigated to attack your dependants, it follows that those who aided him in the enterprise were his co-religionists."

"Do you hear that, Vinicius?" interrupted Petronius. "I told you so."

"You do me honour," said Chilo. Then he continued, addressing himself more particularly to Vinicius:

"The maiden worships the same deity as is adored by the most virtuous lady in Rome—namely, by Pomponia. Also, I have heard that Pomponia has been condemned for her adoration of strange divinities. Yet what the nature of her deity may be, or what his devotees may be called, I have not yet been successful in learning. To do so I should need to become intimate with the sect, to figure as one of its most earnest members, and to gain the confidence of the latter. Consequently I would ask you, my lord, whom I know to have spent fifteen days in the mansion of the noble Aulus, whether you can shed any light upon the subject?"

"No," said Vinicius.

"Well," continued the other, "you have questioned me at length concerning various matters, and to your questions I have replied. Permit me, in my turn, to ask you a few. Did you never notice in that house any object of worship in particular?—did you never witness any particular rite? Were there no, say, statuettes or offerings or amulets of a religious nature in that mansion? Also, did you never see any signs which only Pomponia and the young foreigner could have understood?"

"Signs? Wait a moment. Yes. One day I saw Lygia draw a fish on the sand."

"A fish? Ah! And did she do this once, or several times?"

"Once only."

"And are you *certain* it was a fish she drew?"

"Yes," said Vinicius, growing interested. "Can you guess what it can have meant?"

Quo Vadis

"Can I guess, indeed?" cried Chilo. Then with a low bow he added:

"How fortune always heaps her favours upon illustrious lords like yourselves!"

"You may consider the new coat as good as given," remarked Petronius.

"For which," rejoined the sage, "may Ulysses thank your nobility."

With another bow he left the room.

"What think you of this respected sage?" asked Petronius.

"I think," cried Vinicius cheerfully, "that he will find Lygia. But I also think that, if anywhere there exists a Kingdom of Rogues, he would be fully competent to rule it."

"Incontestably! I must cultivate a closer acquaintance with this Stoic. Meanwhile I intend to have the atrium disinfected."

As he walked along Chilo Chilonides balanced in his hand (hidden beneath the folds of his new coat) the purse which he had received from Vinicius. Delightedly he appraised its weight and the chink of its contents. Yet he walked slowly, and with frequent turnings round to see that no one was eyeing him from Petronius' house. Passing the portico of Livy, he reached the corner of the Clivus Vibrius, and then turned in the direction of the Suburra.

"I must go and see Sporus," he said to himself; "for at least I ought to offer a few drops of liquor to Fortuna. At last I have found what I have so long been looking for. This lord is young, headstrong, and as generous as the mines of Cyprus. Indeed, for this damsel of a Lygia he would give away half his fortune. Yes, *he* is my man—the man for whom I have been seeking this many a day. Yet I must be careful with him, for I augur nothing good from his habit of contracting his brows. Ah, to-day these wolf-cubs rule the world! Of Petronius I have not so much fear. Ye immortal gods, why is it that a mess of pottage is to-day of more worth than is virtue? So the maiden has drawn a fish in the sand, has she? If I know what that may mean may I be strangled with a cord of kid-skin! But I *shall* know what it means. For the rest, since fishes live in the sea, and aquatic researches are less comfortable than are those on terra firma, the quest will cost me more than I have yet received. Another purse like this one, and I shall be able to throw away my beggar's wallet, and to buy me a slave. Yes, but what if I were to advise you, Chilo, to buy, not a male slave, but a *female*? Oh, I know you. I know that you would not sniff at such a one. Let her be as comely, say, as Eunice, and she would rejuvenate

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you in a twinkling, as well as prove to you a source of honourable and sure profit. For instance, already I have sold this poor Eunice a couple of strands of my old coat. Yes, she is exceedingly simple, but if Petronius were to give her to me I should accept her. Ah, Chilo, son of Chilo, you have lost your father and your mother—you are become irrevocably an orphan: offer, therefore, to yourself at least the consolation of a slave. True, she will have to live somewhere, but Vinicius will hire her a lodging, and you yourself also can use it as a refuge. Also, she will need clothes to wear. Well, Vinicius will pay for her apparel. Lastly, she will have a mouth that will require to be filled. That mouth Vinicius shall supply with sustenance. How bitter is life! Where are the times when an obolus could fill one's hands full of pork and beans, or fit one out with a nice red slice of goat's meat—a slice as long as the arm of a twelve-year-old boy? However, here I am at the residence of this thief of a Sporus. A tavern is always the easiest place wherein to glean information."

With that he entered the hostelry, and ordered a flask of "dark" wine. To the host's incredulous glance he replied by fumbling in his purse, and drawing thence a piece of gold, which he laid upon the table.

"Sporus," he said, "to-day I have been working with Seneca from dawn to midday, and you see before you the honorarium with which he has sped me on my way."

Sporus' round eyes grew rounder still, and in a twinkling the wine was confronting Chilo. The latter dipped his finger in the liquor, and then drew on the surface of the table a fish.

"Sporus," he continued, "do you know what that signifies?"

"A fish? Well, well! A fish, a fish? Why, it signifies just a fish."

"Yes, you are, as I thought, a fool, even though you add sufficient water to your wine to make it easy to find a fish in its depths. Know, then, that this is a symbol which, in the language of philosophers, connotes 'The smile of Fortuna.' If you had ever guessed that, perhaps *you* would have made your fortune by now. In future, therefore, pay respect to philosophy, or I shall have to change my tavern, even as my old friend, Petronius, has long been advising me to do."

Quo Vadis

XIV

DURING the next few days Chilo remained invisible; but Vinicius who, since the day when Lygia's feelings had first become known to him, had desired more than ever to recover her, began his search again on his own account, since he neither could nor would enlist Cæsar's assistance—and all the less so inasmuch as the latter was in a state of absorbed anxiety about the health of the little Augusta.

Yet neither sacrifices to the gods nor prayers nor vows nor the skill of physicians nor the resources of the magic art (though the last-named were strained to the utmost) could save the child; and within a week the little one was dead. This plunged both the Court and the city into mourning. Cæsar, who had been delirious with joy when the child was born, was delirious with grief now that his offspring was no more. For two days he took no nourishment, and, though the palace was besieged with senators and great personages who had come to offer him their condolences, he refused to see any one. The Senate met in extraordinary session, and deified the deceased infant—voting it a temple, and also a priest for its special worship. Likewise sacrifices were offered in other temples to the dead child, and statues of it cast in precious metals. Finally, the funeral ceremonies constituted a vast rite at which the populace had an opportunity of witnessing the uncontrollable grief displayed by Cæsar. The people wept with him, while at the same time it stretched out its hands for largesses, and delighted, above all things, in the splendour of the spectacle.

Petronius was feeling very uneasy, for the whole city had come to know that Poppæa attributed the death to spells. The physicians also kept repeating that it was so, since they were anxious to explain away the check to their skill; while in this they were joined both by the priests (whose sacrifices had been proved to be unavailing), by the magicians (who were trembling for their lives), and by the people. Consequently Petronius felt no regret at Lygia's disappearance; but since he wished no ill to the Aulus family, as well as wished well both to himself and to Aulus, he hastened, as soon as ever the cypress-bough had been suspended before the Palatine in token of mourning, to attend the reception which was accorded to the Senators and the Augustans—his main object being to ascertain thereat how far the idea of the spells had taken root in Nero's mind.

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With a face of stone, except that his eyes flashed as they gazed into space, Nero sat listening to the condolences showered upon him by knights and senators. It was clear that, however much he might be suffering, he was also thinking of the effect which his grief was producing upon his adherents. A living statue of Niobe, he made a fine figure of paternal woe—a figure neither more nor less impressive than could be produced by any comedian upon the boards of a theatre. At one moment he would feign to be about to throw dust upon his head, while at another moment he would utter a deep groan. On perceiving Petronius, he sprang from his seat, and said in a tragic voice:

“Alas! Do you also come hither—you who have been the cause of the infant’s death? It was you who introduced within these walls the evil spirit which with a look sapped the life of the child. Woe is me! Would that my eyes had never beheld the light of Helios! Woe, woe is me! Alas, alas!”

Raising his voice, he concluded by sending forth a series of heartrending cries. Into Petronius’ head there came an instant resolve to play a bold stroke. Stretching forth his hand, he seized the scarf which Nero was wearing, and pressed it to the Emperor’s mouth.

“My lord,” he said compassionately, “set fire to Rome, and even to the universe if your grief should bid you do so; but do not, do not injure your voice.”

All who were standing near gaped in astonishment, and Nero himself was wholly taken back. Only Petronius remained unmoved. He knew what he was doing, and that Terpnos and Diodorus had formally ordered Cæsar not to strain his voice beyond a certain point, lest he should harm the vocal organs.

“Cæsar,” Petronius went on with the same sad dignity, “we have experienced an immense loss. At least let the treasure which you know of remain to us as a consolation.”

Nero’s face quivered, and, the next moment, a flood of tears gushed from his eyes. Claspings Petronius’ arm, he laid his head upon his friend’s breast, and repeated between his sobs:

“You, and you alone, could think of that at such a moment.”

Tigellinus turned yellow with spite, but Petronius continued:

“Depart, O Cæsar, for Antium. There it is that your child first saw the light; there it is that you were happy; there it is that there will come to you comfort. The air of the sea will refresh that divine throat, and your lungs

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will be able to breathe in the salt mist. We who are faithful to you will follow you everywhere; and while we are striving to soften your grief with our devotion, *you* will be able to console us with your singing."

"Yes," said Nero, in a woe-begone voice, "I will write a hymn in the child's honour, and compose also the music to it."

"And then you will seek the sunshine at Baia?"

"And then I will seek forgetfulness in Greece."

"Yes, in the land of poetry and song."

From that point there began a conversation which, though pitched in a mournful key, related to plans for the future—to travels, to artistic subjects, and to the receptions which would be necessary in view of the coming visit of Tiridates, King of Armenia. Then Tigellinus started afresh upon the subject of spells, and this time Petronius, sure of his victory, accepted the speaker's challenge.

"Tigellinus," he said, "do you believe that spells can prove stronger than the gods?"

"Cæsar himself has said it," replied the courtier.

"Grief said that, not Cæsar. What is *your* opinion on the subject?"

"That the gods are too powerful to be outdone by spells."

"If that is so, then you deny the divinity of Cæsar and his family."

"Peractum est!" murmured Eprius Marcellus at Petronius' side, in the phrase employed to show that a gladiator had been touched in such a fashion as to necessitate no further combat.

Tigellinus bridled with anger, for between him and Petronius there had long existed a marked rivalry—with this advantage to Tigellinus that Nero put no rein upon himself in his presence. Yet always, at each bout, Petronius had overcome his enemy by dint of superior spirit and skill.

Tigellinus said no more, but contented himself with making a mental note of the knights and senators who surrounded Petronius when the latter at length retired to the other end of the room.

On leaving the palace, Petronius repaired to Vinicius' mansion, and related to him the incident.

"Not only have I deflected the peril from Plautius and Pomponia, but also I have saved ourselves, as well as prevented a hue and cry being raised for Lygia. As a matter of fact, I suggested to this monkey with the yellow beard that he should depart for Antium, and thence for Neapolis and Baia. He will go there right enough, for until

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now he has never dared to make a public appearance in Rome, but has always meant to show himself for the first time in Neapolis. Again, he dreams of going to Greece, where he longs to uplift his voice in song in each of the principal towns, and then, crowned with the garlands which the 'Græculi' will doubtless offer him, to make a triumphal entry into Rome. Meanwhile we shall be free to continue our search for Lygia, and to get her into a safe asylum. Our honourable philosopher has not called again, has he?"

"That 'honourable philosopher' of yours is a rogue. No, he has not called again; nor will he."

"Well, I think better, not of his honesty, but of his sagacity. Moreover, since he has succeeded in draining your purse once, he will return, even if it be only to drain it a second time."

"Let him take care that I do not drain *him*."

"No, do not do that. Be patient until you have at your disposal absolute proof of his roguery. Give him no more money, but promise him, instead, a generous reward if he brings you certainty of success. Have you got anything on foot on your own account?"

"Two freedmen of mine, named Nymphidius and Demas, with sixty slaves, are hunting for Lygia; and to the man who finds her I have promised his liberty. Moreover, I have sent couriers along every road, to question the tavern-keepers, while I myself am beating the city day and night, in the hope of some lucky chance occurring."

"Well, whatever you may discover, pray communicate it to me at once, for I must soon be leaving for Antium."

"I will."

"Also, if, any morning, you should wake and tell yourself that no girl on earth is worth so much trouble, come to Antium in person. There you will lack neither women nor any other sort of pleasure."

Vinicius started to pace the room, while Petronius watched him for a moment or two, and then said:

"Tell me honestly—tell me, not as a man whose head is on fire and revolving around a single fixed idea, but as a reasonable man who is answering a friend: Shall you always hold fast to this Lygia?"

Vinicius stopped, and looked at Petronius as though he had just become aware of his presence. Then he fell to pacing the room again. Evidently he was striving to keep himself in hand. Nevertheless the moment came when the sense of his impotence, coupled with his yearning for Lygia, his fury, and his invincible depression, forced his eyes to shed a stream of tears which made a greater

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impression upon Petronius than even the most eloquent speech in the world could have done.

After a short reflection the elder man said:

"It is not Atlas that supports the universe, but a woman; and perhaps she is playing with her burden as with a ball."

"Yes," was Vinicius' comment.

Upon that the pair took leave of one another, but were interrupted by the entry of a slave, who had come to announce that Chilo Chilonides was waiting in the ante-chamber, and asking for an interview with the master of the house.

Vinicius ordered the philosopher to be admitted, while Petronius cried:

"Did I not tell you so? By Hercules, but you must preserve your calmness, or this man will get the better of you, and wrest the direction of affairs from your hands."

"Health and honour to the noble tribune, and to you, my lord," said Chilo as he entered. "May your happiness equal your glory, and may that glory spread throughout the universe, from the Pillars of Hercules to the frontiers of the Arsacidæ."

"Hail, O lawgiver of wisdom and virtue," replied Petronius; while Vinicius merely inquired:

"What do you bring?"

"The first time, my lord," said Chilo, "I brought you hope. This time I bring you the certainty of recovering the maiden."

"Which means that you have not yet found her?"

"Which means that she still remains undiscovered. Nevertheless I have discovered the meaning of the sign which she drew in your presence, and know who are the men who abducted her, and who is the deity whom she adores."

Vinicius was on the point of leaping from his seat when Petronius laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said:

"Continue."

"I would therefore ask you, my lord—are you absolutely certain that it was a fish that the young girl traced on the sand?"

"Yes."

"Then she is a Christian, and it is the Christians who have abducted her."

There was a moment's silence.

"Listen, Chilo," at length said Petronius. "My nephew has promised you a large sum of money if you should find this maiden again; yet a no less number of strokes with the rod if you should seek to deceive him. In the former case you will be able to purchase, not one, but

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three scribes; whereas, in the second case, all the philosophy of the seven sages, with your own added, will not serve you so well as will some healing ointment."

"The young girl is a Christian, my lord," repeated Chilo.

"Nay; reflect, Chilo; you are no fool. Though we know that Junia Silana and Calvia Crispinilla have accused Pomponia Græcina of being a convert to Christian superstitions, we know also that the Family Tribunal acquitted her of the charge which you appear to be reviving. Do you wish, therefore, to persuade us that Pomponia and Lygia belong to the sect of enemies of the human race, of poisoners of fountains and wells, of adorers of an ass's head, of persons who sacrifice children, and give themselves up to the most brutal debauchery? Nay, think a moment, Chilo. The thesis that you are sustaining—may it not one day rebound, as an antithesis, upon your own back?"

Chilo spread out his hands in a gesture of self-exculpation, and then added:

"My lord, pronounce in Greek the following phrase: 'Ἰησοῦς Χριστός, Θεοῦ Υἱός, Σωτήρ.'"¹

"Very well,"—and Petronius repeated the formula.

"Now take the first letter of each word, and unite them to form a new word."

"ΙΧΘΥΣ!"² cried Petronius in astonishment.

"Yes; and that is why a fish has become the Christian emblem," replied Chilo proudly.

There ensued a silence. Somehow the Greek's reasoning seemed to be irrefutable, and the two friends could not conceal their surprise.

"Vinicius," continued Petronius, "are you quite sure that you were not wrong in thinking that Lygia drew a fish?"

"No!" cried the young man furiously. "By all the infernal gods, but this is enough to drive one mad. If it had been a bird, for instance, that she drew I should have said so."

"Then she *is* a Christian," said Chilo once more.

"Which means," insisted Petronius, "that Pomponia and Lygia poison wells, sacrifice children whom they kidnap in the streets, and surrender themselves to debauchery. The man is an imbecile. But you, Vinicius—you have lived some time in their house; while, in spite of the fact that I have spent but a moment there, I know both Aulus and Pomponia—yes, and Lygia also—too well to say that this is not a foolish slander upon them. If a fish is the Christian emblem, which seems to me undeniable, then, by

¹ Jesus Christ, Son of God, the Saviour.

² Ichthus, the Greek word for fish.

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Proserpina, the Christians themselves are not what we have hitherto imagined them to be."

"You speak like Socrates, my lord," replied Chilo. "Who has ever really examined a Christian? Who really knows their doctrine? Three years ago, when I was on a voyage from Neapolis to Rome (why did I not remain at Neapolis?), I had as travelling companion a physician named Glaucus. Though said to be a Christian, he was a man whom I instinctively felt to be of good and virtuous life."

"And was it from that same virtuous man that you learnt the meaning of the fish?"

"Alas, no, my lord. During our journey the good old fellow received a stab from a dagger in a tavern, and his wife and child were seized for slaves by some merchants. It was while defending him that I lost three fingers of my right hand. Nevertheless, since (so they say) the Christians receive favours in the shape of miracles, I have good hope of seeing the fingers grow again."

"How so? Have you yourself become a Christian?"

"Yes, my lord—since yesterday. It was the fish that brought it about. See what power it possesses! And in a few days more I shall be one of the most zealous of the zealous—so much so that I shall be worthy of admission to all the Christian mysteries: and, once admitted, it will not be long before I shall have learnt where the young girl lies hidden. Perhaps my conversion to Christianity will serve me better than does my philosophy? At all events I have made a vow that, if Mercury will aid me in recovering the maiden, I will offer him too young heifers of identical age and growth, with their horns richly gilded."

"Then your Christianity of yesterday and your philosophy of ancient standing permit of your still retaining your faith in Mercury?"

"Always I hold the faith that is most convenient to the needs of the moment. So far as that goes, my philosophy will be specially acceptable to Mercury. Unfortunately, worthy sirs, you know not how distrustful the god is. He puts no reliance upon promises—no, not even upon those of out-of-work philosophers like myself. Beyond a doubt he would prefer his heifers in advance; and that will entail an enormous expenditure. Not every man is Seneca, and, for myself, I have not the wherewithal to indulge in such liberality as Seneca's; but if the noble Vinicius would deign, as a small sum on account of the total sum which he has promised me, to—"

"Not an obolus, Chilo," said Petronius. "Not a single obolus. Vinicius' generosity will surpass your wildest hopes

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only when Lygia has been found—that is to say, when you have pointed out to us her hiding-place. Doubtless Mercury will give you credit for the two heifers—although I am not altogether surprised at his lack of confidence, which, for my part, I recognise to be his presence of mind.”

“Listen to me, good sirs. The discovery which I have made is an important one. True, I have not yet recovered the young girl, but I know the road which she is bound to follow; and though you have sent out your freedmen and slaves into all the city and the provinces, have they yet brought you any trace of her? No, not the least in the world: I alone have come forward with a piece of information. I would say more; I would say that among your slaves there may exist, unknown to you, a certain proportion of Christians, for already this particular superstition is spreading in every direction. Such men, far from aiding you, would betray you. It may even be a pity that they have seen me here; and that is why I should recommend you, noble Petronius, to enjoin silence upon Eunice, and you, noble Vinicius, to repeat high and low that I come to sell you an ointment which assures success in the Circus when your horses have been rubbed with the same. Alone I shall carry out my search, and alone I shall recover the fugitives. As for you, you must have confidence in me, and believe that every payment on account will be an encouragement to me, in that every such payment will incite me to hope for more, as well as to retain a certainty of success which will mean more to me even than the promised reward. Ah yes, as a philosopher I *do* despise money—although Seneca does not scorn it, nor yet Musonius nor Cornutus—men who, nevertheless, have not lost fingers in protecting the unfortunate, and therefore can handle the stylus, and transmit their names to posterity! However, without counting the slave whom I intend to buy and this Mercury to whom I have promised a couple of heifers (and you yourselves know that of late the price of cattle has risen), it is certain that the quest itself will entail upon me a considerable outlay. Be patient with me a little. Even during the last few days this walking about has raised sores on my legs. I have had to visit wineshops in order to chat with one person and another, and then bakers’ establishments, and then butchers’ stalls, and, lastly, the emporia of vendors of olives and fish. I have scoured every street and alley; I have looked in at the hiding-places of runaway slaves; I have lost nearly a hundred asses¹ at mora; I have frequented laundries, bleaching-grounds, and low eating-houses; I have interviewed muleteers and

¹ Small copper coins.

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sculptors; I have hobnobbed with persons who prescribe for diseases of the bladder and extract teeth; I have conversed with dried-fig merchants; I have gone the round of the cemeteries. And why have I done all this? In order to draw everywhere this fish, and then to look folk in the eyes and see what response they have to make to the sign. For a long time I remarked nothing; until one day, near a fountain, I caught sight of a slave who was weeping as he drew water. Approaching him, I inquired what might be the cause of his tears; whereupon he sat down with me upon the steps of the fountain, and replied that all his life long he had been laying by sestertius after sestertius in order to redeem a beloved son of his, but that his master, one Pansa, had deprived him of the money, while at the same time retaining the son as a slave. 'And I am weeping like this,' concluded the old man, 'because it is useless for me to say, "God's will be done!" No, poor sinner that I am, I cannot restrain my tears.' Seized with a presentiment, straightway I dipped my finger in the bucket, and drew the figure of a fish; and at the sight of it the good man exclaimed, 'My hope also is in Christ.' Next, I asked him, 'Do you recognise the sign?' to which he replied, 'Yes, and may peace be with you!' I plied him further, and in his senile innocence he ended by telling me all. His master, this Pansa, is a freedman of the illustrious Pansa, as well as a man who transports to Rome, by way of the Tiber, the building stone which slaves and workmen unload by night from rafts, and convey to mansions which are in process of being constructed. Among these fellows there are several Christians, including the old slave's son; but since the work is too hard for the young man's strength, his father has been desirous of redeeming him. Unfortunately Pansa has preferred to keep both the money and the slave. While conversing with me, the father burst out weeping afresh, and I mingled my tears with his—which was easy enough for me to do, seeing that not only is my heart a good one, but also my limbs were in agony through excessive walking. I lamented to him the fact that, since I had arrived from Neapolis but a few days ago, I, as yet, knew none of our brethren, nor yet the spot where they met for prayer; whereupon he expressed astonishment that the Christians of Neapolis should not have given me letters of recommendation to their comrades in Rome. To this I replied that the letters in question had been stolen from me during the journey; which at once led the old man to bid me meet him by night near the river's bank, where he would present me to brethren, who, in their turn, would convey me to houses of prayer, and to the

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residences of the elders who direct the Christian community. Upon hearing this I felt so overjoyed that I gave him the sum necessary to redeem his offspring, in the hope that the generous Vinicius would repay me double, and—"

"Chilo," interrupted Petronius, "in your story the falsehood, like oil, comes floating to the surface of truth. Certain am I that, in the course of your researches, *one* decisive advance has been made; but for you to anoint your news with a coating of knavery is sheerly useless. What is the name of the old man from whom you learnt that Christians recognise the sign of a fish?"

"Euricius, my lord. Oh the poor, wretched old man! He reminded me of the physician Glaucus whom I defended when attacked by brigands. That is why I felt so moved by his tale."

"Well, I believe you really did make the old slave's acquaintance, and that you will know how to profit by the circumstance: but that you gave him any money I do *not* believe. No, you gave him not even an as, do you hear? You gave him nothing at all."

"But I helped him to carry his water-pitchers, and I spoke of his son with great sympathy. However, nothing can escape the intelligence of the noble Petronius, and it is true that I *did* give the man no money, though I gave him some in intention, and in my conscience, which ought to have been sufficient for him had he been a true philosopher. And I made him that little present because I recognised that it was at once expedient and necessary. Pray note, my lord, that it will lead him to present me in a good light to his co-religionists, so that I shall be esteemed of them and win their confidence."

"True," said Petronius; "and you did rightly."

"Then," concluded Chilo, "I came straight hither, in order to raise the necessary means."

Petronius turned to Vinicius.

"Have counted out five thousand sesterii, but only in intention, and in your conscience," said he.

"I will," replied Vinicius. Then to Chilo he added:

"I will also appoint to you a serving-man who shall carry sufficient on his person to meet your needs. This man you will present to Euricius as your slave, and give the old man some money in the presence of the said 'slave.' Also, since you have brought me an important piece of news, you yourself shall receive a similar sum. Come, therefore, to-night both for the 'slave' and for the money."

"You are a true Cæsar," said Chilo. "You must permit me to dedicate to you my forthcoming work on philosophy, as well as, to-night, to recoup myself for

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out-of-pocket expenses. Euricius informed me that the fleet of rafts has now been unloaded, and that others are expected from Ostium. 'Peace be with you.' It is thus that the Christians salute one another on parting. I can now purchase a slave—or, rather, a slave-girl. Fishes are caught with a line, and Christians with a fish. *Pax vobiscum! Pax, pax, pax!*"

XV

PETRONIUS to VINICIUS:

"By the hand of a trusty slave I send you, from Antium, this letter; to which I hope to receive from you, by the hand of the same messenger, a speedy response, even though your hand be more inured to wielding the sword and the javelin than to manipulating the pen. I left you hot on the scent and full of hope: consequently I trust that already you have sated your passion in Lygia's arms, or that you will be sating it before the breath of winter has descended upon the Campagna from the heights of Soractum. My dear Vinicius, may the flaxen-haired goddess of Cyprus be your guide, and may you, in your turn, be the master and preceptor of a Lygian dawn which shall soon give place to the glorious noon of love! Always remember that marble, however precious it be, is nothing in itself, and acquires its value only when the hand of the sculptor has transmuted it into a masterpiece. Be you, therefore, such a sculptor. To love is not sufficient: it is necessary also to know *how* to love, as well as how to *express* love. The common herd, and even the animals, can feel pleasure; but from them the true man is distinguished by his ability both to mould that pleasure into an art that is charged with nobility and to appreciate it as a gift from the gods; with the result that he gratifies not only his body, but also his soul. Often, when I think of the vanity, the uncertainty, and the tedium of our lives, I ask myself whether you have not chosen the better part—whether war and love are not the only two things for which it is worth while to be born and to live.

"In war you have been fortunate: be you equally so in love. Also, if you care to hear what passes at Nero's Court I will send you occasional news of the same. Here we are installed at Antium, and taking due care of our heavenly voice, but feeling always a hatred for Rome, wherefore we are formulating a plan for wintering at Baïæ, and then making a public appearance at Neapolis, where the inhabitants, being Greeks, know better how to appreciate us than do the wolf-cubs on the banks of the

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Tiber. The populace will flock to greet us from Baiaë, from Pompeii, from Puteola, from Cumæ, from Stabia. We shall lack neither applause nor laurels. And this will encourage us the more in our plans for visiting also Achæa.

"And the memory of the little Augusta? Yes, we still bewail it. We sing hymns of our own composition, and in such marvellous fashion that, out of very jealousy, the sirens have gone and hidden themselves in the remotest depths of Amphitrite's caves. True, the dolphins would listen to us gladly, were it not that they are prevented from doing so by the roaring of the sea. Our grief is not yet assuaged, and therefore we exhibit it in every pose of which sculpture permits. Ah, dear friend, we shall die in the skins of buffoons and comedians.

"All the Augustans are here, as well as the female Augustans, without counting the five hundred female asses who contribute their milk to Poppæa's daily bath, and ten thousand attendants. Sometimes we have our little diversions. Calvia Crispinilla is growing old, and the story goes that, by begging and praying, she has obtained Poppæa's permission to take her bath immediately after Augusta. Also, Lucan has given Nigidia a drubbing because he suspected her of carrying on an intrigue with a gladiator. Sporus has lost his wife to Senecio in a game of dice in which she represented the prize. Torquatus Silanus has offered me, in exchange for Eunice, four bay horses which will certainly win races this year. I have refused them. In the same connection I thank you once more for having declined the damsel. As a matter of fact, poor Torquatus is already a shade, rather than a living person; for his death has been resolved upon. What crime has he committed? Why, the crime of being the great-grandson of the divine Augustus. For him there is no salvation left on earth. Such is our world!

"Also, as you know, we had expected to see Tiridates here, but Vologeses has indited a cross-grained letter in which he says that, inasmuch as he has conquered Armenia, he must have the country left to Tiridates—else he will not surrender it. Of course, his real purpose is to make a fool of every one. Furthermore, we have decided upon another war. Corbulo will receive the same power as was given to the great Pompeius during the wars with the pirates. For a moment Nero hesitated about doing this, for he feared the glory which might accrue to Corbulo thereby. There was even a talk of offering the chief command to Aulus, but Poppæa opposed that course. Evidently she finds herself unable to digest Pomponia's virtue.

"Vatinius has promised to give us, at Beneventum,

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some splendid gladiatorial contests. See to what a pitch, in these days, bootmakers like he can attain, despite the proverb, 'Let the cobbler stick to his last!' Vitellius is the grandson of a bootmaker, and Vatinius is the actual son of one. Possibly with his own fingers he plied the awl! Last night the actor Aliturus gave us a fine representation of Œdipus. Since he is a Jew, I made bold to ask him whether Jews and Christians were synonymous terms; but he replied that, whereas the religion of the Jews has existed from all eternity, the Christians are a sect which arose recently in Judæa. Also he informed me that in Tiberius' day we crucified an individual whose followers are still multiplying in number, and who is looked upon by them as a god. It seems, too, that they refuse to recognise all other gods, and, in particular, our own—though how it could hurt them to be respectful to the latter I cannot see.

"Tigellinus no longer seeks to conceal his hostility to myself. Hitherto he has not got the better of me, though he has the advantage of clinging more eagerly to life than I do; but he can be more scurrilous than can your humble servant; and that renders him a *persona grata* with Ahenobarbus. Sooner or later those two will come to an understanding with one another, and then I shall be lost. When will that be? I know not. But since it *must* be, the exact date does not matter. In the meanwhile I must try to amuse myself. This life would not be disagreeable were it not for Bronzebeard, to whom one owes the fact that at times one feels disgusted with oneself. Indeed, I find myself likening the pursuit of his favours to a circus race, or to a game, or to a struggle in which victory deprives one of one's self-respect. At other times I seem to be a kind of Chilo—not a whit better. When the latter shall no longer be of use to you, send him to me, for I have conceived a liking for his suggestive conversation. Also, present my respects to your divine Christian maiden—or, rather, beg of her, in my name, not to be, as it were, a fish to you. Finally, write and tell me of your health and of your love. Learn, yourself, how to love, and then communicate to her the lesson. *Vale!*"

MARCUS VINICIUS to PETRONIUS:

"Lygia is not here; but were there no hope of recovering her, you would not be receiving this answer, seeing that, when life has disgusted one, one no longer cares to write.

"With a view to ascertaining whether Chilo had been deceiving me or not, I seized the occasion of the night when he came to obtain of me the money for Euricius to wrap

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myself in a military cloak, and secretly to follow him and the young servitor whom I have given him. When they arrived at the spot indicated I watched them from a distance, concealed behind a windlass, and so learnt beyond a doubt that Euricius is not a myth. Below, by the bankside, some fifty men were discharging, by torch-light, the stones with which a large raft was laden, and piling them on the quay. Chilo I saw approach these fellows, and enter into conversation with an old man, who presently threw himself upon his knees, while the others surrounded the pair, uttering cries of astonishment. Next, under my very eyes the young servitor handed the old man the bag of money, and the recipient began to pray with hands extended towards the skies, while beside him there knelt a young man—evidently his son. Chilo then pronounced, for the second time, some words which I could not catch; after which he blessed the two men who were kneeling, as well as the others who were assisting at the ceremony, by tracing in the air some signs in the form of a cross. In response to this all present bowed the knee. I felt disposed to burst into the midst of the gathering, and to offer three bags of the same value to him who would bring me Lygia; but there was the risk of spoiling Chilo's intrigue, and, after a moment of reflection, I departed.

"All this took place at least twelve days after your departure. Since then Chilo has more than once called upon me to say that he has acquired great influence among the Christians. He pretends that, though he has not yet recovered Lygia, the reason is that the Christians now constitute an immense sect in Rome, and therefore know not all their members, nor are able to take cognisance of all that passes in the community. Moreover, for the most part, they are prudent and taciturn. Yet he also assures me that, once he can get at the old men whom they call their priests, he will be able to worm out their secrets. Already, says he, he enjoys the acquaintance of several of these priests, and has attempted to question them in cautious fashion, in order not to arouse their suspicions by an insistence which would make the enterprise still more difficult. Of course the waiting is painful, and I have only a scanty store of patience at my command; yet that he is right there can be no doubt, and I contain myself as well as I can.

"Also Chilo has learnt that, for the purpose of common prayer, these Christians have meeting-places which, in many cases, are situated outside the city gates, or in deserted houses, or even amid the sand quarries. There they adore their Christ, and sing, and indulge in feasts.

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Such meeting-places are numerous, and Chilo thinks that Lygia must be attending other rendezvous than those frequented by Pomponia, in order that the latter, if questioned or arrested, may be able to swear that she does not know where the young girl is hidden. Perhaps the priests have given her that prudent advice. When Chilo has got to know of one of these spots I intend to accompany him thither; and, should the gods accord me a glimpse of Lygia, I vow by Jupiter that *this* time she shall not escape my hands!

"These meeting-places are for ever in my thoughts. Chilo does not like my following him thither, for he is nervous; but I simply cannot rest at home. I should recognise her at once, even though she were disguised or veiled, even though it were night time (which is the usual season for these assemblies). In fact, I should recognise her anywhere by her voice and gestures. I myself shall go disguised, and keep an eye upon all who enter or depart. Always is the maiden in my thoughts: consequently always shall I be able to know her again. Chilo is to come to me to-morrow, and we shall set out on our quest. With me I shall take some weapons. Several of the slaves whom I sent into the provinces have returned without result. I am certain that she is here, in the city, and, perhaps, close at hand. Among other things, I have visited certain houses as though I wished to take lodgings in them; and certainly she would be far better off in my establishment than she could possibly be in them; for whereas they swarm with a multitude of needy wretches, I should grudge her nothing. You write that I have chosen the better part. Yes, I have chosen the part of care and disappointment. First of all we shall visit certain houses which are in the city, and then others which lie outside the city gates. Every day one has hopes of the morrow. Were it not so, life would become impossible. Also, you write that one must know *how* to love. I had no need to learn how to *speak of* love to Lygia! Ah, how I am dying to see her! Ever I look and look for Chilo's coming. I cannot bear the sight of my house. *Vale!*"

XVI

CHILO remained so long invisible that Vinicius knew not what to think. In vain he told himself that, to attain results at once favourable and certain, the search must be slow.

Against the voice of reason both his blood and his

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imperious temperament rebelled. To do nothing, to wait, to sit with folded arms was a thing so contrary to his nature that he could not resign himself to such a course. To rush about the streets of the city in the mantle of a slave led to nothing. With him, however, it was a way of cheating his own restlessness, even though it failed to soothe him. Intelligent men among his freedmen whom he had ordered to make inquiries on their own account showed themselves, nevertheless, a hundred times less discerning than Chilo; and, in proportion as his love for Lygia grew more furious, there became fixed in him the obstinacy of the gambler who means to win at all costs. He had always been like this; from his earliest years he had entered upon his schemes with the passionateness of a man who cannot understand that things ever come to grief or have to be renounced.

Though military discipline had to a certain extent curbed his impetuosity, it had also imbued his mind with the conviction that every order which he issued to his inferiors must be fulfilled. Moreover, his long sojourn in the East, among men who were subservient and accustomed to obedience like slaves, had strengthened in him the idea that to his "I will" there could be no limits. Hence the fact that his self-respect had received such a terrible hurt. Also, in these obstacles, in this resistance and flight of Lygia, there was a spice of the incomprehensible, a touch of the enigmatical, which was torture to a mind of his type. He felt that Acte had spoken truth when she declared that he could never be indifferent to Lygia. Yet, if so, why had the maiden preferred a wandering life and misery to his love, to his caresses, to his splendid mansion? Sometimes the force of his imagination would bring her to his eyes as vividly as though she were actually present, and one by one he would recall every word that he had said to her, or that she had uttered in his presence. He would feel her against his breast and in his arms, and at such moments his passion would burst forth like a flame—he would yearn for her, and call aloud her name. And whenever he told himself that she loved him in return, and might have granted him, of her own free will, what he desired of her so ardently, he would sink under the weight of a boundless disappointment, while his heart would feel filled with a sense of infinite tenderness. Yet at other moments he would turn pale with anger, and console himself by thinking of all the humiliations and punishments with which he would visit Lygia when he found her. He wanted not only to have her in his house, but also to possess her as an absolute slave, while at the same time feeling that, were he to be given the

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choice between becoming *her* slave and never again seeing *her*, he would prefer the state of bondage. Indeed, there were occasions when he would even picture to himself the marks that the rod should leave upon that rosy form, as well as the kisses that he would like to impress upon those marks. He had almost reached the idea that to kill *her* would be a happiness to him.

The effect of this struggle, of this torture, of this uncertainty, of this longing was that both his health and his looks became marred. Also, he took to acting as a cruel, pitiless master. His slaves, and even his freedmen, would approach him in fear and trembling. Indeed, as he rained his terrible, purposeless, unjust chastisements upon them, they conceived against him absolute hatred; of which being sensible, as also of his loneliness, he revenged himself upon them the more. Only with Chilo did he put a curb upon himself, lest the Greek should abandon his quest. This Chilo duly noted, and set himself the more to circumvent his employer, and to prove increasingly exacting.

One day he arrived with a face so downcast that poor Vinicius turned pale at the sight of it, and darted to meet him with scarce strength even to inquire:

"Then she is not with the Christians?"

"Yes, she is, my lord," replied Chilo; "but among them I have found also Glaucus, the physician."

"What say you? Who is *he*?"

"You have forgotten, my lord, the story of the old man with whom I travelled from Neapolis to Rome, and in whose defence I lost three fingers of my right hand. The brigands who carried off his wife and children stabbed him with a dagger, and I left him (so I thought) expiring in a tavern near Minturna. Yet, though I long mourned him, I always had an idea that he was still alive, and that he formed one of the Christian community in Rome."

"But since you helped him, he ought to be grateful to you, and to help you in return?"

"Ah, noble tribune, the gods themselves are not always grateful: so what can be said of men? Yes, he *ought* to recognise my services to him; but, unfortunately, he is an old man whose mind has grown feeble and become dulled with age and adversity; so that, far from being grateful, he accuses me (so I have learnt from his co-religionists) of having been in league with the brigands, and brought about his misfortunes. *That* is how he rewards me for the loss of my fingers."

"As a matter of fact, I am certain that the affair happened as he says," remarked Vinicius.

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"Then you know more about it than he does," retorted Chilo with dignity, "for he only *supposes* it to have been so—which, however, will not prevent him from appealing to the Christians, and wreaking a cruel revenge upon me. Yes, he would do this beyond a doubt, and his fellows would help him. Fortunately he does not know my name, nor did he catch sight of me in the house of prayer where I encountered him. At first I was for throwing myself upon his neck, but prudence and a habit of reflecting before acting held me back; and, since, I have learnt that he is looked upon as a man who was betrayed by a fellow traveller on the road from Neapolis. Otherwise I should not have known of the story which he tells."

"Well, what does this matter to me? Tell me what else you saw in the house of prayer."

"No, it does not very much matter, my lord: only, since he is thirsting for my skin, and I wish my teaching to survive me, I would rather renounce the promised reward than risk my life for perishable goods—goods without which I, as a true philosopher, can well live and seek divine truth."

Vinicius approached him with a countenance full of menace, and said in a stifled voice:

"Who has told you that you are likely to die by the hand of Glaucus rather than by mine? Are you sure, you dog, that before many minutes are over you will not be lying buried in my garden?"

Chilo, who was essentially a coward, looked at Vinicius, and saw in a twinkling that another imprudent word would seal his fate.

"I will search for her, my lord, and I will *find* her," he cried in haste.

A silence followed during which nothing was to be heard but Vinicius' deep-drawn breathing and, in the distance, the singing of some slaves who were working in the garden.

Then the Greek, seeing that the young patrician was growing a little calmer, said:

"Death, before now, has passed close to me, yet I have looked it in the face with a supineness equal to that of Socrates. No, my lord; never have I said that I would renounce the quest of this young girl. I only wished to point out to you that these steps entail upon me a considerable amount of danger. Once upon a time you used to doubt the existence of Euricius; and although I have convinced you, with your own eyes, that the son of my father has told you the truth, you now suspect me of having invented Glaucus. Alas! If only he *were* a myth! To be able to go among the Christians with my old security I would gladly resign the poor old slave whom I bought three

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days ago. Glaucus is alive, my lord, and, should he once perceive me, you will never again behold my form. Who *then* would recover for you the young girl?"

"What is to be done?" asked Vinicius. "What remedy have you? What do you wish me to undertake?"

"Aristotle has told us that we must sacrifice small things to great; and King Priam used to say that old age is a heavy burden. Now, the burden of old age and of misfortune has long been pressing upon Glaucus—so much so that death would come to him as a blessing. 'What is death,' says Seneca, 'save a deliverance?'"

"Play the buffoon with Petronius, not with me. Say what it is you propose to do."

"If virtue is buffoonery, then may I remain a buffoon all my life! I propose, my lord, to put Glaucus out of the way."

"Then if you will engage some men to club him to death, I will engage to pay them."

"But they would only fleece yourself, my lord, and then trade upon your secret. In Rome there are as many bandits as there are grains of sand in the Circus arena; and you would scarcely believe how these fellows hasten to raise their prices as soon as ever an honest man has had recourse to their services. No, illustrious tribune. Moreover, are you certain that night watchmen would not catch them in the act? The wretches would say, to a certainty, that you had engaged them; and such an exposure might involve you in unpleasantness. Myself, on the contrary, they could not denounce, for I should not have told them my name. You do wrong not to trust me, for, apart from my uprightness of character, pray remember that the matter concerns two things in addition—namely, my skin, and the reward which you have promised me."

"What do you want?"

"I want a thousand sesterii; for do not forget, my lord, that I shall have to find honest bandits who, after pocketing the earnest money, will not disappear without giving us news. For good work good payment is necessary. Also, I shall want something for myself, in order to dry the tears which I shall shed over Glaucus. If you will give me the thousand sesterii to-day, in two days more his soul will have gone to Hades, and only there (if shades preserve their memory and the gift of reflection) will he see how much I loved him. Yes, this very day will I find the men, and warn them to be ready to start to-morrow night; saying that for every day that Glaucus remains alive I shall deduct a hundred sesterii from their honoraria. In addition, I have another plan which seems to me infallible."

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Once more Vinicius promised Chilo the sum demanded; but forbade him henceforth to speak of Glaucus at all. Next, he asked the philosopher what news he had brought with him, where he had lately been, and what he had discovered. Chilo had nothing much to tell. He had visited two more Christian houses of prayer, and scanned the faces of every one present, more especially of the women. Yet no one had he seen who in any way resembled Lygia. At the same time, said he, the Christians looked upon him as one of themselves, and, now that he had come forward with the money necessary to redeem Euricius' son, they respected him also as a man who followed in the footsteps of Christ. Moreover, the Christians had told him that imprisoned in Rome, in consequence of a complaint laid by the Jews, there was a great lawgiver named Paul of Tarsus, whose acquaintance Chilo was resolved to make. Another thing that had given him the greatest possible pleasure was the fact that the supreme pontiff of the sect, who had been an actual disciple of Christ, and to whom the latter had entrusted the direction of the faithful throughout the world, was soon to visit Rome. Beyond a doubt every Christian in the city would be eager to see him, and to hear his preaching; wherefore there would be large gatherings, at which he, Chilo, would also be present. Nay, more: since it is an easy matter to conceal oneself in a crowd, he would introduce Vinicius to those gatherings, and infallibly Lygia would be found, since, once Glaucus had been removed, they would encounter no danger of a serious character. Talking of vengeance, the Christians might, in their turn, revenge themselves, but in general they were people of a peaceable nature.

Upon that Chilo went on to remark, with some surprise, that never had he seen the Christians give themselves up to debauchery, or poison wells and fountains, or worship an ass's head, or eat the flesh of infants. In short, he had never seen them act as enemies of the human race. No, never had he beheld such things. Doubtless he would be able to find among them men who, for a reward, would cause Glaucus to disappear; but in general, and so far as he could ascertain, Christian doctrine did not encourage murder, but on the contrary, ordained that wrongs should be forgiven.

Vinicius, for his part, recalled what Pomponia had said to him in Acte's rooms, and felt greatly pleased at Chilo's words. Much as his feeling for Lygia resembled hatred, it was a relief to him to hear that the doctrine which he and Pomponia professed was neither criminal nor infamous. Yet in him there was dawning also a perception that this

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mysterious, this incomprehensible worship of Christ was just what had created the barrier between himself and Lygia; with the result that he was beginning to feel towards that worship at once enmity and fear.

XVII

It was a matter of real concern to Chilo that Glaucus should be removed; since, old though the physician might be, he was by no means decrepit. The Greek had once been Glaucus' friend, but afterwards had betrayed him, given him up to bandits, separated him from his family, robbed him, and tried to have him assassinated. Yet the memory of these events had never troubled Chilo, for the reason that it was not in a tavern, but in the open country, near Minturna, that he had abandoned Glaucus to his agony. One thing only had he not foreseen: and that was the fact that Glaucus might recover of his wounds, and reach Rome. Now the Greek's only course was to get rid of the old man, and to choose assassins for the purpose. Inasmuch as Chilo passed the majority of his evenings in dramshops where there gathered folk destitute alike of home, of faith, or of respect for the laws, it was an easy matter for him to recruit fellows who were ready for any villainy. On the other hand, there was the risk of falling in with men who, as soon as they scented the cash that he had about him, would begin by robbing him of it, or, after pocketing the earnest money, would use threats of blackmail to get hold of the remainder. Besides, for some time past Chilo had felt a dislike for the rabble of base, horrible wretches who lurked in the dens of the Suburran and Trans-Tiberian regions. Judging, as he did, every one by himself, and having but partially fathomed the Christians and their doctrine, he thought that amongst them he would find instruments pliant to his hand—though, certainly, since the Christians appeared to be more honest than their fellow men, he had resolved to approach them with the affair in such a way that they would undertake it not only out of cupidity, but also out of zeal.

With this aim in view, he repaired, the same evening, to Euricius' abode. He knew that the old man was devoted to him, body and soul, and would do anything to serve him; but, cautious by nature, he, Chilo, had no intention of revealing to him his real design, which, as a matter of fact, would have directly conflicted with the confidence placed by Euricius in the virtue and piety of his benefactor.

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Chilo's aim was to have at his command men ready for anything, yet so to treat with them that, in their own interest, they would be forced to remain for ever silent about the affair.

After redeeming his son, old Euricius had rented one of the small shops which swarmed around the Circus, and become a vendor of olives, figs, unleavened bread, and water mixed with honey, to the spectators of the games. Chilo found him at home, and engaged in setting out his wares. Saluting him in the name of Christ, the visitor entered upon the business which had brought him thither. He began by saying that, since he, Chilo, had done the Christians a service, he counted upon the fact being recognised. Next he remarked that he had need of two or three strong, courageous men who would be competent to avert a great danger which was threatening himself and Christians in general. True, he was poor, but he could pay for such a service, on condition that the men in question returned his confidence, and faithfully fulfilled what might be ordered them.

Upon this Euricius and his son declared that they themselves were ready to execute any command that he might give them, since they felt certain that a man so pious would never demand from them conduct which was not in conformity with the teaching of Christ.

Chilo assured them that this was so. Raising his eyes to heaven, he appeared to be praying, but all the while was debating whether it would not be well to accept their proposal, seeing that to do so might save him a thousand sesterii. After a moment's reflection, however, he refused the offer. Euricius was an old man who was not so much broken with old age as weakened with care and sickness, while Quartus was but a boy of sixteen; and Chilo needed men who were active and strong. As for the thousand sesterii, he counted, in any case, upon saving a large portion of them, thanks to the scheme which he had devised.

"Sir," continued Quartus, "I know of a baker named Demas in whose mill there work both slaves and paid assistants. Of the latter, one is so strong that he is as good, not as two men, but as four. I myself have seen him lift blocks of stone which four ordinary men could not move."

"If this fellow is a true believer in God, and capable of sacrificing himself for his brethren, pray make him known to me," said Chilo.

"He is a Christian, sir," replied Quartus. "Few are given work at Demas' mill who are not of our faith. Also,

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there are day workmen and night workmen; and this man is one of the latter. If we were to go there now we should arrive when they are taking their evening meal, and you could speak to him freely. Demas' place is near the Emporium."

Chilo gladly agreed. The Emporium was situated at the foot of the Aventine, and consequently not far from the Circus. By following the river until the Porticus Æmilius was reached it would be possible to avoid crossing the hill, and so to shorten the journey.

"I am old," said Chilo as soon as they had reached the colonnade, "and sometimes suffer from absence of memory. Christ whom we worship was betrayed by one of His disciples, but for the life of me I cannot at this moment remember the disciple's name."

"Sir, it was Judas. He went away and hanged himself," replied Quartus, a little surprised that a name like that could be forgotten.

"Ah, yes. Judas. I thank you," said Chilo.

For a while they proceeded on their way in silence. Reaching the Emporium, which was already closed, they passed it, rounded the stores where free distributions of grain were made, and turned to the left in the direction of a line of houses which stretched along the Ostium road as far as Mount Testacius and the Forum Pistorium. There they halted before a wooden building whence came the sound of grain being ground between millstones. Quartus entered the building, while the prudent Chilo remained outside.

"I am curious to see this Herculean miller," he said to himself as he glanced at the brilliantly radiant moon. "If he should prove to be a rogue and a rascal it will cost me rather dear; but if, haply, he be a virtuous Christian and a fool, he will do for nothing what I ask of him."

In these reflections the Greek was interrupted by the return of Quartus with a man who was clad in one of those workman's smocks which leave bare the arms and the right side of the breast. At the sight of the newcomer Chilo heaved a sigh of satisfaction. Never had he seen such an arm or such a breast.

"Here he is, sir," said Quartus. "This is the brother whom you desired to see."

"The peace of Christ be with you," replied Chilo. "Do you, Quartus, first satisfy our brother of my *bondâ fides*, and then return home, seeing that it is not befitting that your aged father should remain unattended."

"This worthy gentleman," said Quartus obediently to the new-comer, "is a man of piety who sacrificed his entire

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fortune to redeem me from slavery, although previously I had been unknown to him. May our Sovereign Redeemer requite him with a heavenly recompense!"

On hearing these words the gigantic workman bowed his head before Chilo, and kissed his hand.

"What is your name, brother?" asked the Greek.

"Father, at my holy baptism I received the name of Urban."

"Then, Urban, can you speak to me freely for a moment or two?"

"Yes, for our work does not begin again yet. At present we are preparing the evening meal."

"Good. Then we shall have time enough. Let us proceed to the river's bank, and you shall hear what I have to say to you."

Seating themselves upon a block of stone on the quay, they found themselves surrounded by a stillness that was broken only by the distant sound of the millstones and the murmuring of the river. Chilo scanned the form of his companion, and perceived that, though his expression was a trifle hard and melancholy (as was frequently the case with barbarians resident in Rome), his face appeared to reflect only goodness and sincerity.

"Yes," thought the Greek to himself, "this fellow is the sort of honest fool who would kill Glaucus for nothing."

Then he inquired:

"Urban, do you love Christ?"

"Yes, I love Him from the bottom of my heart."

"And do you love your brethren, and your sisters, and all who have taught you the truth and faith in Christ?"

"Yes; I love them also, my father."

"May peace be with you."

"And with you, my father."

Upon this Chilo fixed his eyes upon the moon, and began to speak in a low voice of the death of Christ. He spoke less as though he were addressing Urban than as though he were confiding the secret to the slumbering city. In the scene there was something moving and solemn. The workman burst into tears; and when Chilo went on to groan, and to lament the fact that until the moment when the Saviour was put to death He could find no one to defend Him from the insults of the soldiers and of the Jews, the barbarian's enormous fists clenched themselves in an access of restrained anger and longing.

Then Chilo asked him abruptly:

"Urban, do you know who Judas was?"

"Yes, I know full well who he was; but he hanged

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himself." In the barbarian's tone there rang a note of regret that the traitor should have been the instrument of his own retribution.

"Yet, supposing he has *not* hanged himself," continued Chilo, "and supposing some Christian were to meet him again, whether on land or sea, would it not be that Christian's duty to avenge the blood and agony and death of the Saviour?"

"Ah, who would *not* avenge them, my father?"

"Peace be with you again, O faithful servant of the Lamb. Yes, one may pardon offences done against oneself, but who may pardon offences done against the Almighty? Even as a serpent begets a serpent, and wickedness begets wickedness, and treachery gives birth to treachery, so of the venom of Judas there has been born another traitor; and even as the one delivered the Saviour to the Jews and to the Roman soldiers, so the other, who is living here in our very midst, would deliver the Saviour's sheep to the wolves. Consequently, should no one prevent this treachery, should no one crush in time the head of this serpent, we shall all be undone; and with us there will disappear the glory of the Lamb."

The workman looked at him with a sort of vast calm, as though he could not properly envisage what the Greek had said; until presently the latter, covering his head with the skirt of his mantle, repeated in a sepulchral voice:

"Woe unto you, servants of the True God! Woe unto you, Christian men and Christian women!"

Again there was silence—a silence broken only by the grinding of the millstones, the subdued chant of the millhands, and the splashing of the river.

"My father," inquired the workman at length, "*who* is this traitor?"

Chilo bowed his head. Who was the traitor? He was one of Judas' sons—a son born of his father's venom, a man who, passing as a Christian, visited houses of prayer with the sole object of denouncing brethren to Cæsar by declaring that they refused to look upon him (Cæsar) as a god, that they poisoned fountains, and sacrificed children, and sought to destroy the city so that not one stone should stand upon another. In a few days the prætorian guards were to be ordered to put chains upon all old men, upon women and children, and to lead them to death, even as had been done with the slaves of Pedanius Secundus. This was the work of the second Judas. But since no one was ready to punish the first Judas, since no one had sought to defend Christ in the hour of His passion, who would now come forward to punish the second traitor, to crush the

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head of the serpent, to remove him before he could gain speech with Cæsar?

Suddenly Urban, who had been sitting in silence on the edge of the stone, sprang to his feet, and said:

"I will do it, my father!"

"Then go you into the midst of the Christians; go you to our houses of prayer, and inquire of the brethren where is Glaucus the physician. And when he has been pointed out to you, then, in the name of Christ, kill him."

"Glaucus?" repeated the workman as though he desired to impress the name upon his memory.

"Do you know him?"

"No, I do not. There are thousands of Christians in Rome, and no one of them knows all his fellows. But to-morrow night, brethren and sisters, high and low, will be meeting at Ostrianum, since the great Apostle of Christ has arrived in Rome, and is going to preach there. At that meeting my brethren will show me Glaucus."

"At Ostrianum?" asked Chilo. "But that is outside the city walls. Are *all* the brethren and *all* the sisters to be there, to-morrow night, at Ostrianum?"

"Yes, my father. Our cemetery too is there—between the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana. How comes it that you did not know that the great Apostle was to preach there?"

"Because it is now two days since I last left home; wherefore I have not yet received the Apostle's letter. Nor, for the reason that I have but recently arrived from Corinth (where formerly I was head of the Christian community), do I know where Ostrianum lies. However, all will now be well; and inasmuch as Christ has laid upon you this commission, go you to Ostrianum, my son, and seek out Glaucus from among the brethren, and put him to death while he is returning to the city. For reward, your every sin shall be pardoned; and, for the moment, may the peace of God go with you."

"My father—"

"I am listening, O son of the Lamb."

Some embarrassment had made its appearance in the workman's aspect. Not so very long ago he had killed a man—possibly two men, and the Christian doctrine forbade such killing. True, he had not killed them in his own defence, for even that was not permitted; nor had he killed them for gain—heaven forbid! The bishop had gone so far as to lend him some of the brethren to help him, but at the same time had instructed him not to take life. Yet he, Urban, had taken life without actually meaning to do so, since God had punished him with a gift of overweening

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strength. Now he was expiating his fault, and expiating it in pain and sorrow. His companions used to sing over the millstones, but he, poor wretch, could think of nothing but his sin and the offence done to the Lamb.

What prayers had he not offered up; what tears had he not shed? And how many, many times he had begged pardon of the Lamb! Still, he felt that he had not wholly atoned his fault. . . . And now he had promised to kill another man, a traitor! . . . Ah well! One ought not to pardon offences save those done against oneself, so he would kill this man, even though it had to be under the very eyes of the brethren and the sisters who would be at Ostrianum to-morrow. Yet ought not Glaucus first to be condemned to death by the superiors of the brotherhood—by the bishop or by the Apostle? To kill a man was a slight thing—to kill a traitor was even a pleasure, just as one might kill a wolf or a bear: but what if, after all, Glaucus were *not* guilty? How, in that case, could he, Urban, take upon himself the responsibility of a new murder, of a new sin, of a new offence against the Lamb?

"My son," broke in Chilo, "there is not time to try the traitor, for from Ostrianum he would go straight to Cæsar at Antium, where he would take refuge in the house of a certain patrician whose attendant he is; but I am going to give you a sign which, when you come to report to me that you have killed Glaucus, will win for you and for your noble deed the blessing both of the bishop and of the Great Apostle."

And, drawing from his pocket a sestertius, he scratched on its surface, with the point of his knife, a cross, and then handed the coin to the workman.

"There is at once Glaucus' sentence and a sign for yourself. When, after removing the traitor, you present this sestertius to the bishop, he will pardon you, even as he did for the other murder which you involuntarily committed."

Despite himself, the workman extended his hand towards the money. Yet the first killing was still fresh in his memory, and he felt within him a sort of fear.

"My father," he said in a tone almost of entreaty, "I pray you take this act upon your conscience. Have you with *your own ears* heard Glaucus betray his brethren?"

Upon this Chilo understood that he must furnish a few proofs and cite a few names.

"Listen, Urban," he said. "I live at Corinth, but am a native of Cos. In Rome I am imparting the doctrine of Christ to, among others, a slave-girl of my own country, named Eunice, who serves in the mansion of a certain Petronius (a friend of Cæsar's) as a folder of robes. Well, in that very mansion I have heard Glaucus undertake to

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betray all the Christians in the city, as well as heard him promise a certain Vinicius (who also is a friend of Cæsar's) that he, Glaucus, will recover from among the Christians a young virgin."

At this point he stopped, and remained gazing in amazement at his companion, whose eyes had flashed like the eyes of a ferocious animal.

"What is the matter?" the Greek asked in alarm.

"Nothing, my father. To-morrow I will kill Glaucus."

The Greek said no more for the moment; but presently, taking the workman by the shoulders, he turned him about in such a fashion that the light of the moon fell full upon his face. Gazing into the latter, Chilo debated for a while whether it would not be well to question the Lygian further, and so clear the air.

For once his natural caution gave way. Drawing a couple of profound breaths, he laid his hand upon the workman's head, and asked him distinctly, yet solemnly:

"Is Urban really the name that you received at your holy baptism?"

"Yes, my father."

"Indeed? Then, Urban, may peace be with you."

XVIII

PETRONIUS to VINICIUS:

"You are not doing well, dear friend. It is all too clear that Venus has disturbed your soul, and caused you to lose both reason and memory and the faculty of thinking of anything in the world save love. If, some day or another, you will re-read the answer that you have sent me, you will see to what an extent your mind has become indifferent to everything which is not Lygia, and how it occupies itself with her alone, and how it always returns to her, and revolves around her, even as a hawk hovers over the quarry which it covets. By Pollux, but if the flame which is consuming you does not soon reduce you to ashes, you will become metamorphosed into the Sphinx of Egypt—into the Sphinx which, smitten with love for the pale Isis, became dull and indifferent to everything else, and only longed for the night time, in order that, with its eyes of stone, it might gaze at its beloved.

"Yes, pray spend your evenings in running, disguised, about the city; pray continue to frequent the Christians' houses of prayer with your philosopher. Anything that begets hope and kills time is worthy of praise. Yet, for

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the love of me, at least do *this*: always take with you (since this Ursus, this slave of Lygia's, is a man of extraordinary strength) the slave Croto, and march upon these expeditions in full force of three. Such a course will be less dangerous and more reasonable. If it is true that Pomponia Græcina and Lygia are Christians, undoubtedly the Christians are not bandits: yet that does not mean that they will passively approve of measures designed to rob their flock of one of its members. When you catch sight of your well-beloved, I know that you will attempt to carry her off then and there: but how will that be feasible if you have only Chilo to help you? On the other hand, let but Croto come with you, and *ten* Lygians like Ursus could not defend Lygia.

"At Court we have already ceased to speak of the little Augusta, or to repeat that sorcery brought about her death. Poppæa makes an occasional allusion to the theory, but Cæsar's mind is otherwise occupied. Moreover, if it be true that Poppæa is once more in an interesting condition, the memory of her first child is not likely to remain with her much longer. We have for some days past been at Neapolis—or rather, at Baiæ. If you were capable of thinking about anything at all, the echoes of our doings here would certainly have reached your eyes by now, seeing that Rome cannot possibly have got any other subject to discuss. We came straight hither (that is to say, to Baiæ), where at first we found ourselves crushed with remorse at the memory of our mother. Yet what, should you suppose, has been the effect of this upon Bronzebeard? Why, simply that the murder of his mother is serving him as a theme for versification—as an excuse for a series of tragicomic scenes! Formerly he felt genuine remorse only in so far as he was a coward; but, now that he has succeeded in convincing himself that the earth remains solid beneath his feet, and that no deity has yet requited him with his deserts, he stimulates remorse merely in order to move folk's pity. The other night he sprang out of bed, exclaiming that he was being pursued by the Furies. He woke us up, and kept glancing behind him, and striking the attitudes of a comedian playing Orestes (and very badly at that!) the while he declaimed Greek verses, and glanced at us out of the corner of his eye to see how we were taking it. We, of course—well, we were lost in admiration; and, instead of saying, 'Oh, go back to bed again, you fool!' we rose to an equal height of tragedy, and defended this great artist from the attacks of the Furies.

"Probably you have heard that he has made a tardy public appearance in Neapolis? For this purpose all the Greek rabble of Baiæ and the neighbouring towns was

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collected together; with the result that the arena became filled with such a disgusting stench of sweat and garlic that I thanked the gods that I was sitting behind the scenes with Bronzebeard. Do you suppose he was afraid the while? Yes, he *was* afraid, and very much so. He laid my hand upon his breast, and I could feel his heart beating there in a regular tattoo. Also, his breath was coming in pants, and when the moment arrived for him to appear he turned perfectly livid in the face. Yet he knew well that behind every row of seats there were posted prætorian guards, armed with clubs and ready, in case of need, to stimulate enthusiasm. As a matter of fact, this course proved unnecessary, since no troupe of monkeys from the neighbourhood of Carthage could have howled as loudly as did that vulgar mob. I tell you that the smell of the garlic reached even the dais. Nero saluted, pressed his hands to his heart, threw kisses right and left, and—burst into tears! That done, he came tumbling down amongst us (we were behind the dais) like a drunken man. ‘What,’ he cried, ‘are all the triumphs in the world as compared with this of mine?’ And, sure enough, the mob below us continued to howl and to applaud, for it knew that its acclamations would win the Imperial favour and largesses and a banquet and lottery-tickets and another exhibition of their Fool Cæsar. It is not to be wondered at that these folk shouted; for, surely, never before could they have seen such a sight! As for him, he kept repeating: ‘The Greeks, the Greeks! Yes, there you see my Greeks!’

“I have an idea that ever since that moment his dislike of Rome has increased the more. Yet couriers have been dispatched to the capital city to announce the triumph, and we expect presently to receive the thanks of the Senate for the same. Immediately after this first public appearance a singular circumstance occurred; for the theatre suddenly collapsed, and fell inwards, just after the people had passed out. I myself had departed by the left-hand entrance. Yet not a single corpse did I see taken from the ruins. In this event many people—even some of the Greeks—discern a token of the divine wrath, on the ground that the majesty of the Imperial Throne has been profaned. Cæsar, for his part, avers that the event was merely a proof that the gods have taken under their protection both his singing and the folk who listen to it. Hence offerings in all the temples, great thanksgivings, and added encouragement to Nero to extend his travels to Achæa. Yet a few days ago he told me that he was feeling nervous as to what the people of Rome might say about it—that he feared a rising on their part; firstly, because of their love for himself, and, secondly,

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because of the fact that his long absence has deprived them of games and the distributions of grain.

"Soon we are off to Beneventum, where we shall witness the splendours (worthy of a cobbler) with which Vatinius intends to distinguish himself; after which, under the protection of the divine brothers of Helen, we shall set sail for Greece. For myself, I have noticed one thing in particular—namely, that when one is in the midst of madmen one soon becomes mad also—as well as, what is more, addicted to the follies of madmen. Greece, and this voyage to the accompaniment of a thousand lutes; this Bacchanalian march of triumph amid nymphs and bacchantes who are crowned with flowering myrtles and vine leaves; these chariots and flowers and thyrsi and garlands and cries of 'Evohe' and music and poetry and applauding Hellenes—all this is very well, but we cherish schemes of a bolder nature still. Envy is leading us on to found a sort of Oriental Empire of fairyland—an Empire of palm-trees and sunshine and poetry and realities transformed into dreams and life transmuted into a perpetual round of pleasure. We wish to forget Rome, and to plant the centre of the world somewhere between Greece, Asia, and Egypt; to live the life, not of men, but of gods; to wander through the Archipelago in gilded galleys, under purple sails; to be a personality compounded of Apollo, Osiris, and Baal; to tinge ourselves with the colour of the roseate dawn; to gild ourselves in the rays of the sun; to silver ourselves over with the beams of the moon; to reign and to dream; to—— And would you believe it, but I, who still retain a certain modicum of sense and of sensibility, find myself succumbing to these fantastic ideas! Yes, I let myself toy with them, not so much because they are practical, as because they are at least grand and ingenious.

"Some future day, some day in the very far future, some day in the centuries still to come, such a fairyland Empire will be looked back upon by men as a dream that has passed away; but so long as Venus assumes not the form of a Lygia, or, at least, that of a slave like Eunice; so long as life is not embellished by art—so long, I say, will our existence remain empty, and wear a simian mask. Bronzebeard will never realise these conceptions of his; for in the fabulous realm of poetry and of the Orient there will be no place either for treason or for death. Yet he—well, under the semblance of a poet, he conceals the personality of a fourth-rate actor, added to that of a smooth-faced tyrant.

"In the meanwhile we suppress any one who displeases

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us. Poor Torquatus Silanus is as good as dead, for he opened his veins some days ago; while Lecanius and Licinius are accepting the Consulate in fear and trembling. Also, old Thræseas is not likely to escape death, seeing that he is venturing to remain an honest man. For myself, Tigellinus has not yet succeeded in obtaining an order to bid me open my veins, for I am still too necessary to Cæsar, not only as 'Arbiter of the Elegances,' but also as indispensable organiser of the expedition to Achæa. Sooner or later, however, it must come to that; and when it does so, what, do you suppose, will be my principal care? Why, to see that Bronzebeard does not succeed to the Myrrhonian cup which you know of and have so often admired. If you *should* happen to be within reach, at the time of my death, I will send you the cup; but if you should be at a distance, I will break it in pieces. Meanwhile we have in reserve Beneventum and its cobbler, and Olympian Greece, and the Fate which marks out for each of us our route into the Unknown.

"May things prosper with you. Take into your employment this Croto; else, for the second time, you may find yourself deprived of Lygia. Also, when Chilo has ceased to be useful to you, send him to me, wherever I am. Perhaps I shall yet be able to make of him a second Vatinius. Perhaps we shall yet see consular officials and senators bowing before his face, even as we see them shaking in their shoes before the Knight of the Awl. To behold such a spectacle would render life worth living. When you have recovered Lygia, write and apprise me of the fact, in order that I may offer to Venus, in her little round temple at Baiæ, a brace of swans and a couple of pigeons. In a dream have I seen Lygia seated on your knees, and begging for your kisses. See to it that the dream shall prove one of a prophetic nature. May there be no clouds in your sky—or, if there be any, may they possess both the colour and the perfume of the rose."

XIX

SCARCELY had Vinicius finished reading this letter when Chilo entered the library. He did so unannounced, since the servants had received orders to let him pass at any hour of the day or night.

"My lord," he began, "may the divine mother of Æneas, your noble ancestor, be as favourable to you as has been the divine son of Maia to myself."

"Which means that—?"

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"Eureka!—I have found her!"

"That you have actually seen her?"

"No; but I have seen *Ursus*, my lord, and spoken to him."

"And do you know where the party are hidden?"

"No, my lord. Another man than myself would not have failed (blinded by conceit) to let the Lygian perceive that he had recognised him. Another man than myself would have sought to make the Lygian chatter, in order to ascertain where he was living. And in that case another man than myself would either have received a blow of the fist that would have left him for ever indifferent to the things of this world, or he would have aroused the giant's distrust—with the probable result that this very night another hiding-place would have been found for the maiden. For myself, my lord, it sufficed to learn that *Ursus* is working near the Emporium, in the establishment of a certain miller named Demas—a man named similarly to your own freedman; and that knowledge has sufficed me, for the reason that, in the morning, one of your confidential slaves will be able to follow this *Ursus*, and so to discover the hiding-place in question. I bring you the certainty that, since *Ursus* is here, *Lygia* also is in Rome, as well as the news that, to-night, she will, in all probability, be at *Ostrianum*."

"At *Ostrianum*? Where is that?"

"It is an old hypogeum¹ between the *Via Salaria* and the *Via Nomentana*. The great Christian pontiff of whom I have spoken as being momentarily expected has arrived in the city; and to-night he is to baptise and preach in that cemetery."

Vinicius, who had hitherto lived in a fever of disappointment, felt himself grow faint as he saw his hopes on the point of becoming realised. He grew faint as does a man whom a long journey has brought to the end of his strength. *Chilo* remarked this, and resolved to profit by it.

"True, the city gates are guarded, my lord, and the Christians cannot but know it; but of gates they have no need, any more than has the *Tiber*; they would not mind making a long round to see the 'Great Apostle.' Indeed, they have thousands of ways of passing the city's boundaries. At *Ostrianum*, my lord, you will see *Lygia*; and even should she *not* be there (which I scarcely expect to be the case), at least *Ursus* will be present, seeing that he has promised to kill me *Glaucus*. That being so, either you can follow him (and so learn where *Lygia* is residing) or your men can seize him as a murderer. Once he is in their hands, you

¹ Catacomb.

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will be able to make him reveal where he has hidden the girl. Now I have fulfilled my mission. Any other man than myself would have pretended that, with Ursus, he had drunk some ten beakers of the finest wine before extracting from the barbarian his secret. Any other man than myself would have pretended that he had lost to Ursus a thousand sestertii in scriptæ duodecim, or that he had given the slave two thousand in exchange for his information. However, for what I *have* disbursed I know you will repay me double. Ah well! Once in my life—that is to say, throughout the whole of my life—I have been honest, even as I intend to remain now; for, with the magnanimous Petronius, I believe that the sum-total of my expenses, as well as the utmost pitch of my expectations, will be surpassed by your generosity."

"My generosity will not fail you; but first of all you must go with me to Ostriatum."

"To Ostriatum?" replied Chilo, who had not the smallest desire to repair thither. "Noble tribune, I have promised to show you where Lygia is; but I have not promised to recover her. Think, my lord, what might happen to me if, after tearing Glaucus in pieces, this Lygian bear were to perceive his mistake! Would he not look upon me as having been the cause of the murder which he had just committed? Remember, my lord, that the profounder a philosopher one may be, the more difficult does one find it to reply to the foolish questions of churls. If, therefore, he were to demand of me the reason why I had accused the physician Glaucus, what should I be able to reply? If you still suspect me of deceiving you, I would say: 'Pay me only when I have actually pointed out to you the house in which Lygia is dwelling; but in the meanwhile show me at least an earnest of your generosity, in order that, should you meet with an accident (from which may the gods defend you!), I may not have laboured in vain.'"

Vinicius took a purse from a coffer, and threw it to Chilo.

"There are some scrupula for you," he said. "When Lygia has become a slave in my house you shall receive another purse like the present one, but full of aurei."

"You are Jupiter himself!" cried Chilo.

"And now you can get something to eat, and also take some rest. Not until this evening will you leave the house, for, as soon as night falls, you are to accompany me to Ostriatum."

For a moment dread and consternation again showed themselves in the Greek's features, but he soon recovered his composure, and said:

"Who can resist you, my lord? For myself, these

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scrupula"—and he caused the purse to chink—"have outweighed my scruples, without mentioning your society, which is to me both an honour and a pleasure."

Impatiently interrupting the speaker, Vinicius questioned him at length concerning his conversation with Ursus. As the upshot Vinicius felt assured that that night he would either discover the young girl's hiding-place or succeed in abducting her during her return to the city from Ostrianum. At the thought a sort of mad joy filled the young patrician's breast.

Now that he felt practically certain of recovering Lygia, his grudges against her had entirely disappeared. Indeed, he was ready to pardon any one anything. Even against Ursus he cherished no resentment; while Chilo, who, despite his services, had always inspired him with disgust, now seemed to him a man at once amusing and level-headed. The whole house had taken on a more cheerful air, and his own aspect had brightened. Within himself he could feel a renewed touch of youth and of the joy of living; and this awoke in him also his old desire for Lygia, even as in spring the earth awakens from slumber under the hot kisses of the sun. Yet his transports of passion were less blind and savage, as well as more joyous and tender, than they had formerly been.

Encouraged by his patron's good humour, Chilo took it upon himself to impart advice. It was necessary, he said, to act with great caution and certainty—and he enumerated a number of precautions. Vinicius admitted that he was right, and, remembering also Petronius' admonitions, gave orders to his slaves to send for Croto. Chilo, who knew every one in Rome, was greatly reassured when he heard the name of the celebrated athlete. It seemed to the Greek that, with Croto's aid, his purse of aurei would be much easier to win. Consequently he felt in good heart when the superintendent of the atrium came to summon him to table; and while he was eating he kept telling the slaves present that his purpose in coming to see their master was to procure him some marvellous ointment which, when rubbed upon the hooves even of the slowest horses, caused the latter to leave behind them all competitors. This recipe he had acquired from a Christian, for the older Christians were as skilled in sorcery and miracles as were the Thessalians themselves—and every one knew how celebrated Thessalia had become for its sorcerers. The Christians had enormous confidence in him, and wherefore? Well, any one who knew what a fish meant would know the reason. As he discoursed Chilo kept scanning the slaves' countenances, in the hope of discovering among them some

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Christian whom he could denounce to Vinicius; until, finding his efforts of no avail, he again betook himself to eating and drinking in generous style, while not forgetting to praise the cook, and to assure him that he would tackle Vinicius on the subject of his (the cook's) redemption. The only thing that marred his cheerfulness was the thought that that night he had to go to Ostrianum. Yet at least he would be in the company of two men, one of whom, as a wrestler, was the god of all Rome, while the other was a powerful patrician.

"Even should Vinicius be discovered," he said to himself, "no one would dare to lay so much as a hand upon him; while, for myself, he would be a clever rogue who will see, this night, even the tip of my nose!"

The meal over, Chilo stretched himself upon a bench, placed his mantle under his head, and, the moment that the slaves had cleared the table, went to sleep. He awoke only when Croto had arrived; and by the time he had reached the atrium the wrestler was arranging his terms for the expedition, and saying to Vinicius:

"By Hercules, my lord, but you did well to have recourse to me to-day; for to-morrow I leave for Beneventum, at the summons of the noble Vatinius—there to wrestle, in Cæsar's presence, with a certain Syphax, the strongest negro that Africa has produced. Can you not hear the cracking of his spine in my embrace, and the thud of this fist upon his black jaw?"

"By Pollux," replied Vinicius, "but I am at least certain that you will do him an injury."

"And, in injuring him, you will be doing well," added Chilo. "Yes; break also his jawbone. It is a good idea, and will constitute an exploit that will do you credit. I am prepared to wager that you *will* break his jawbone. In the meanwhile do not omit to rub your limbs with oil, my Hercules, or to wear a stout girdle; for you may have to deal with a veritable Cacus. The man who is protecting the maiden in whom our lord Vinicius is interested possesses, it would appear, a measure of strength that is above the ordinary."

Chilo's object in saying this was to put Croto on his mettle.

"Yes," added Vinicius; "and it is said of this fellow that he can seize a bull by the horns, and drag the animal whithersoever it pleases him."

"O-oh!" exclaimed Chilo, who could not believe that Ursus was so strong; but Croto merely smiled disdainfully.

"I will undertake," said he, "to seize with this hand of mine whomsoever you may point out to me, and with

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the other hand to defend myself against seven Lygians like this fellow, and eventually to remove the maiden to your house, even though all the Christians in Rome were pursuing me like a pack of Calabrian wolves. Should I fail to do so, may I be beaten with rods in this very impluvium."

"Do not let him act thus," cried Chilo to Vinicius. "Suppose these men should throw stones at us? What would Croto's strength then avail us? Would it not be the better course to seize the maiden when she has returned to her house, and thus avoid exposure both of her and of ourselves?"

"Yes, that is my view also, Croto," said Vinicius.

"Well, since it is you who are to pay the piper, it is for you to call the tune. But remember that to-morrow I must leave for Beneventum."

"I have five hundred slaves in this city alone," rejoined Vinicius. Then he signed to his companions to withdraw, and, entering his library, wrote to Petronius as follows:

"Chilo has found Lygia. To-night, with him and Croto, I am going to Ostrianum, and shall be able to seize the girl either now or to-morrow morning. May the gods heap upon you their favours! Farewell, dear friend. Joy will not permit me to write more."

No sooner had Vinicius indited this epistle than Chilo entered.

"My lord," said the latter, "another idea has just struck me. Beyond a doubt the Christians use certain signs of recognition—certain tessaræ without which no one will be able to penetrate to Ostrianum. Indeed, I know that this is the rule in their houses of prayer, for on one occasion I received just such a tessera from Euricius. Permit me, therefore, to go and seek the old freedman, in order that I may question him closely as to details, and arm myself with some of the tokens of which I speak—if it be true that they are indispensable."

"Very well, noble philosopher," replied Vinicius gaily. "You speak like a man of sense, and deserve to be congratulated. You may go and see Euricius, or do anything else you please; *only*, as a matter of precaution, you will first leave here, upon this table, the purse which you have just received."

Chilo, who never willingly parted company with money, pulled a wry face. None the less he obeyed, and then took his departure. From the Carinæ to the Circus (in the neighbourhood of which Euricius' shop was situated) was but a step: hence night had not fallen when the Greek returned.

"Here are the tokens, my lord," he said.

As soon as dusk began to close in, the party wrapped

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themselves in Gallic hooded cloaks, and provided themselves with lanterns and poniards; in addition, Chilo donned a wig which he had picked up on his way from Euricius' shop, and they all went out—putting their best foot forward, so as to reach the Porta Nomentana before it should have been closed.

XX

FOLLOWING, first, the Vicus Patricius, they next traversed the Viminal as far as the ancient Viminal gate (which adjoined the plain where, later, Diocletian was to build some magnificent baths). Thence, skirting the ruins of the wall erected by Servius Tullius, they arrived, by deserted ways, at the Via Nomentana, out of which they turned to the left, in the direction of the Via Salaria, and found themselves among sand-dunes, interspersed with burial-grounds. It was now night-time, and, since the moon had not yet risen, the party would have had some difficulty in finding their way but for the fact (foreseen by Chilo) that the Christians themselves pointed it out. Indeed, in every direction—to right, to left, and ahead of the party—there were to be seen dark shapes engaged in cautiously making for the sandy hollows. Probably the few passers - by, with such peasants as were returning from the city, took these pilgrims for workmen proceeding to the sand quarries, or else for members of a funeral association who were assembling for a nocturnal wake. At each step taken by the young patrician and his companions the lanterns and the dark forms became more numerous. Some of the persons who passed them were softly chanting hymns which seemed to Vinicius' ear to be charged with melancholy; while every now and then he could catch fragments of phrases in which the name of Christ occurred. Also, the way appeared to him very long. At length something began to glitter in the distance—something which resembled bivouac fires or torches; and, turning to Chilo, he asked him if that was Ostrianum.

Chilo, who was disagreeably impressed by the darkness, by the distance from the city, and by these phantom shapes, answered tremulously:

"I do not know, my lord. Never before have I been at Ostrianum. They would do well to praise their Christ a little nearer to the city's boundaries."

Then for a while they walked in silence; until Chilo, whose terror was growing in proportion as he left the city's gates far behind, remarked:

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"Surely, in this wig, and with the two beans stuffed up my nostrils, I shall never be recognised? And even if they *should* recognise me, they will not kill me, for they are not wicked people—rather, they are honest folk whom I love and esteem."

"Do not try to wheedle them with premature flattery," replied Vinicius. At the moment the party were traversing a narrow ravine through which there ran an aqueduct. Suddenly the moon issued from behind the clouds, and they saw before them, at the end of the ravine, a wall thickly coated with moss. They had arrived at Ostrianum.

At the door a couple of quarrymen relieved them of their tokens, and they found themselves in a huge space that was surrounded on every side by walls. Before the door of a crypt which occupied the centre there bubbled a fountain, while here and there were funeral monuments. Everywhere around there seethed a multitude of people, dimly revealed by the uncertain light of the moon and of lanterns. Whether from fear of the cold, or as a precaution against traitors, practically every one was cloaked in a hood; with the result that the young patrician felt a pang of dismay at the thought that, should those hoods be retained throughout, it would be impossible for him to recognise Lygia.

Presently, beside the crypt which occupied the centre of the enclosure some torches were lit and piled together. Next, the crowd began to sing—at first softly, and then louder, in a strange hymn. It was like a cry in the night—a cry uttered by people who were wandering in darkness. With faces raised, the singers seemed to be looking at something that was far above their heads, and, with extended arms, to be imploring that something to descend. In Asia Minor, in Egypt, and even in Rome, Vinicius had visited the most diverse temples, and made the acquaintance of the most diverse religions; yet never before had he seen persons invoke a deity, not merely in conformity with a given ritual, but as a relief to their hearts, like children separated from father and mother. Clearly these people not only honoured their god, but loved him with the whole strength of their soul.

Next, a few additional torches were lighted at the entrance to the crypt; and in the red glare of the same the glimmering of the lanterns grew pale. At the same moment there issued from the entrance an old man, clad in a hooded cloak, but bareheaded. As he mounted upon a block of stone which was lying beside the pile of torches a movement ran throughout the crowd, and on every side voices murmured, "It is Peter! It is Peter!" Some persons even bent the

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knee, while others extended their hands towards the old man. Presently there fell a silence so profound that only the crackling of the torches could be heard, with the rumbling of chariots on the Via Nomentana, and the sighing of the wind in the neighbouring pine-trees.

Chilo bent towards Vinicius, and whispered:

"It is he, the first disciple of Christ, the fisherman."

The old man raised his hand, and, making the sign of the cross, blessed all present—the congregation this time sinking upon their knees, and Vinicius and his companions following suit, for fear of betraying themselves. To the young tribune it seemed that the figure before his eyes was at once ordinary and uncommon—that the uncommon element in it arose from its very simplicity. The old man had neither a mitre on his head, nor a garland of oak leaves on his temples, nor a palm in his hands, nor a golden tablet on his breast, nor white spangled robes on his limbs. In short, he was wearing none of the emblems affected by the priests of the Orient, of Egypt, of Greece, or of Rome. In this poor fisherman Vinicius saw, not an archpriest skilled in the performance of rites, but an old, simple, infinitely venerable man who had come to proclaim far and wide a truth which he had beheld and touched, and in which he believed as a man believes the testimony of his own eyesight. And Vinicius, who had no wish to succumb to the spell of the scene, felt, nevertheless, a feverish curiosity to hear what was about to issue from the mouth of this companion of the mysterious Christ, and to learn the doctrine which was professed by such women as Lygia and Pomphilia Græcina.

At first Peter spoke like a father who is giving his children advice, and instructing them how to live. He urged his hearers to renounce all excess and pleasure, to love poverty and moral purity and truth, to bear injustice and persecution with patience, to obey their superiors and the authorities, to shun the crimes of treason, of hypocrisy, and of evil-speaking, and to show a good example to every one, including the pagans. Vinicius, however, for whom there was no good in anything which could not restore him Lygia, felt irritated by some of these counsels. In praising chastity and resistance to passion, was not the old man condemning his, Vinicius', love? Was he not inciting Lygia to resist her adorer? The tribune's anger rose. "What is there new in this man's sayings?" he reflected. "Is *this* what the new doctrine amounts to? Why, every one has heard such foolish talk before. Do not the Cynics also laud poverty? And did not Socrates preach virtue as an ancient, but desirable, quality? Does not any

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Stoic you like—even Seneca, who happens to possess five hundred lemonwood tables—extol moderation and truth and patience under adversity and firmness under misfortune? Yes, that kind of thing is like grain thrown into a corner and forgotten—grain that only mice will nibble at, but men will reject, as being mouldy.”

Moreover, Vinicius felt disappointed. He had expected to see revealed some terrible mysteries; at the very least he had looked to hear a rhetorician of skill. Yet all that he had heard had been a few words of infinite simplicity, and he could not sufficiently marvel at the absorbed attention of the congregation.

By this time the old man was telling those present that they ought to be kind, peaceable, upright, chaste, and disdainful of riches—not in order that they might enjoy peace in this life, but in order that, after death, they might live gloriously and for ever in Christ. Despite the young tribune's prejudices, he could not help remarking a difference between this doctrine and the doctrines taught by the Cynics, the Stoics, and other philosophers; which difference was that, whereas the latter recommended virtue and goodness merely as things reasonable and applicable to this life alone, the Apostle promised, as a reward for the same, immortality—and not a miserable immortality in the Inferno, in weariness, solitude, and desolation, but an immortality that should be splendid, that should resemble the immortality almost of the gods. And of this future life Peter spoke with such certainty that the accidents of life on earth appeared, by comparison, futile. To suffer momentarily for a happiness to which there should be no end was a very different matter from suffering because suffering came in the natural order of things.

Once more the old man repeated that virtue and truth should be loved for their own sakes, since essential virtue and eternal truth together constituted God: wherefore he who loved them loved also God, and became thereby His son.

These injunctions Vinicius could not comprehend in their entirety; but from what Pomponia Græcina had said to Petronius he knew that, according to the Christian creed, the god of the Christians was one and omnipotent. Now he had learnt, in addition, that that god was also universal goodness and universal truth, and, in spite of himself, he could not help thinking that, compared with such a demiurge, Jupiter, Apollo, Saturn, Juno, Vesta, and Venus looked like a troupe of mummers who play farces at one time for their common, and at another time for their individual, benefit. But what completed

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the young man's astonishment was to hear the old man declare that God was also universal love, and that, consequently, he who loved his fellow-man fulfilled the most sublime of God's commandments. Nor was it enough to love the people of one's own nation, for the Man-God had shed His blood for *all* mankind! Nor was it enough only to love those who treated us well, for Christ had pardoned even the Jews who had delivered Him to death, as well as the Roman soldiers who had crucified Him! Nor was it enough only to pardon those who had done us a wrong: it was necessary also to love them, and to return them good for evil! Nor was it enough only to love the good: it was necessary also to love the wicked, since love could destroy the wickedness that was in them! For his part, on hearing these injunctions, Chilo reflected that he had given himself a great deal of trouble for nothing, since Ursus would never now decide to kill Glaucus, whether on this night or on any other one. Presently, however, another conclusion—a conclusion drawn, like the first, from the old man's teaching—occurred to console the Greek. It was that Glaucus would never now kill *him*, Chilo, even though he should recognise him.

By this time Vinicius had ceased to blame the patriarch's discourse for containing nothing new; yet still he kept asking himself what it all meant, and what sort of people these were who were present. He felt lost in an unsuspected void—a void at once infinite and dim. This cemetery appeared to be a refuge for madmen—a mysterious, wonderful place where, on a mystical bed, there was in process of birth a new ideal. Though he retained in his mind all that the old man had said concerning life, truth, and the love of God, the young man's thoughts were in a state of dazzlement—of dazzlement from a succession of blinding rays. All that he had heard he looked at through the medium of his love for Lygia; and that light revealed to him the fact that if, as was probable, she was present in the cemetery, and assenting to that doctrine, never, never would she now become his mistress. He might seize her, but he would never *possess* her.

A few more faggots had been cast into the brazier, the sound of the wind among the pines had ceased, and the flame of the torches was ascending straight towards the twinkling stars. The old man, after once more recounting the story of the death on Golgotha, was speaking of Christ, and of Christ alone.

To think that this man had seen Him! Peter related how, after leaving the Cross, he abode two days and nights with John; neither sleeping nor eating, but repeating

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ever and again, in sorrow, abasement, terror, and doubt, that the Lord was dead. On the third day, said Peter, he arose, and was lamenting with John as usual, when Mary Magdalene rushed breathless and dishevelled into the room, crying out: "They have taken away the Master!" At these words all rushed to the Sepulchre—John, the youngest, arriving there ahead of the others, but not daring to enter the empty tomb. Then, when his two companions had reached the place, he (Peter who was now speaking) entered the cave, and beheld on the stone floor only the shroud and the winding-sheet—not the body. Upon this they supposed that the priests had removed Christ, and returned home more downcast than ever. Presently others of the disciples arrived, and joined in their lamentations, in order that the God of the celestial hosts might hear them the more easily. All had hoped that the Master would redeem Israel; but now their hope was gone, seeing that this was the third day since the Lord's death.

Still the memory of those terrible moments was able to draw tears from the old man's eyes. By the light of the brazier the tears could be seen trickling down his grey beard, the while his bald head was bowed between his shoulders, and his voice had died away in his throat.

"This man is speaking the truth," was Vinicius' inward comment. The faithful had heard the story of the Lord's passion many times before, and knew that to sadness there would succeed joy; yet even they were more than ordinarily impressed, seeing that the speaker was an Apostle who had actually seen what he was relating. Claspings their hands together, they sobbed and beat their breasts. The old man closed his eyes, as though the better to see, with mental vision, the distant past; after which he continued:

"Whilst they were thus lamenting, Mary Magdalene again rushed into the room—this time crying out that she had seen the Lord, but, owing to the brilliant light, had, in her confusion, supposed Him to be the gardener. But He, said Mary, had called her by name; whereupon she had exclaimed, 'Rabboni!' and fallen at His feet. Finally, with the injunction that she should go and tell the Disciples, He had disappeared. Nevertheless the Disciples refused to believe her; and though she was weeping for very joy, some blamed her for doing so, while others conceived her grief to have affected her senses—and the more so inasmuch as she kept repeating that before the tomb she had also seen two angels sitting. At length the Disciples returned thither, and found the tomb empty. Towards evening, however, came Cleophas with the tidings that the Lord was really risen; whereupon, after closing all the doors for

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fear of the Jews, the Disciples fell to disputing among themselves. Then suddenly, although the doors had not been unlocked, He appeared in their midst, and said to them: 'Peace be with you.'

"Yes, I too beheld Him even as did the others, and our hearts were filled with light, for we believed that He had come to life again, that the sea would be dried up, that the mountains would fall to dust, and that His glory would be eternal.

"Eight days later Thomas Didymus placed his fingers in the Master's wounds, and touched His side; after which he fell at His feet, crying: 'My Lord and my God!' And the Master replied: 'Because thou hast seen, Thomas, thou hast believed; but blessed be they who have *not* seen, yet have believed.' And we stood and heard those words, and our eyes beheld Him, for He was in the midst of us."

Vinicius listened, but could not make up his mind to believe what the old man said. Yet still he felt that he must be either blind or devoid of reason to suppose that this man had lied when he said, "These things have I seen." In Peter's emotion, in his tears, in his whole personality, in every detail of the events which he had described, there was something which brushed away suspicion. At intervals Vinicius would believe himself dreaming; but each time he again saw around him the silent crowd, he again smelt in his nostrils the smoke of the lanterns, he again beheld at a distance the burning torches, he again became conscious of the fact that near him, by the side of a rock, there was standing an aged man who, near to death's door and with a slightly trembling head, was bearing witness, and saying, "All these things have I beheld."

Then the Apostle continued his story up to the Ascension. Now and then he would stop to rest, for he accompanied his recital with a multitude of details which, one felt, were engraved on his memory as on a slab of stone. Those who heard him were spellbound with his words: they seemed to see themselves transported by some superhuman force to Galilee, and accompanying the Disciples through the forests of that country, and walking by the side of the lake. Yes, for them the cemetery of Ostrianum seemed to have changed into the Sea of Tiberias, while on the shores of that sea, amid the morning mist, they could see Christ standing erect, even as He had stood when John had looked forth from his ship and said, "Behold the Lord!" and Peter had cast himself into the waters in order that he might the sooner arrive at His adored feet. In the aspect of the congregation there was apparent a boundless rapture, a

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complete forgetfulness of existence, a happiness, a love that surpassed all measure. Some, indeed, seemed to have had visions during Peter's recital; and when he went on to relate how, at the Ascension, clouds gathered beneath the Saviour's feet, and hid Him from the eyes of the Apostles, every head was raised involuntarily to heaven, and there ensued a long pause. For these people there no longer existed a Rome, nor a mad Cæsar, nor temples, nor gods, nor pagans: for them there existed only Christ, who filled, in their eyes, both earth and heaven and the sea and the whole universe.

In distant dwellings along the Via Nomentana the cocks were beginning to crow as the harbingers of midnight. All at once Chilo plucked Vinicius by the sleeve, and murmured:

"My lord, I see there—not far from the old man—Urban, with, near him, the young girl!"

Vinicius sprang to his feet like a sleeper who has been suddenly awakened, and turned towards the spot indicated by Chilo. Before him he saw Lygia!

XXI

Yes, he beheld Lygia, and nothing else beside! At last, at last! After all these efforts, after these many days of anxiety and striving and disappointment, he had found her again! Joy can assail a man like a wild beast—it can compress a man's bosom to the point of suffocation; and he, who had always conceived that it was fortune's duty to realise his every desire, could scarcely believe his eyes, could scarcely believe in his happiness. But for this distrust, his headstrong nature might have led him then and there to commit a rash act; but he wished first of all to make sure that he was not dreaming, that this was not one of the marvels of which his head was full. No, it *was* Lygia. He could see her before his eyes, and was separated from her only by a dozen paces. Also, she was standing in clear light. Her hood had slipped from her head, and ruffled her hair in doing so, while her mouth was half-open and her whole figure expressive of rapture and attention as she gazed at the Apostle. Over her shoulders she had thrown a dark woollen mantle, such as a mere daughter of the people might wear; yet never had Vinicius seen her look so beautiful. Even in his state of agitation he was struck with the contrast between the humble costume and the nobility of that patrician head. As though consumed with a flame,

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his body trembled with a love in which there were mingled sadness, adoration, respect, and desire. With his whole being he drank in the sight even as a man might sate, in some vivifying spring, a thirst which tortured him. Beside the colossal Lygian she seemed to Vinicius' eye as small as a child; and he noticed also that she had grown thinner, and that her complexion was so transparent as to make her look like a flower or a spirit. Once more he burned to possess her—her who was so different to all the women whom he had ever seen or possessed in the East or in Rome. For her, he felt, he could sacrifice everything—he could sacrifice Rome and the whole world.

In this state of contemplation he would have remained, had not Chilo again plucked him by the sleeve, lest he should commit an imprudence. However, the Christians had begun again to pray and sing; and when the hymn "Maranatha" had died away the Great Apostle baptised in the fountain those whom the priests presented to him for the purpose. It seemed to Vinicius as though the night would never end, for it prevented him from following Lygia, and carrying her off.

At length a few Christians left the cemetery, and Chilo murmured:

"Let us also go, my lord, and station ourselves by the gate, for we have omitted to remove our hoods, and some of the people are looking at us for that very reason."

So the party did as he proposed. From the spot where they took up their stand they could scan every one who passed through the gate, and it would not be difficult to recognise Ursus' gigantic form.

"We will follow them," said Chilo, "and see what house they enter. Then to-morrow—or, rather, later in the morning—you and your slaves shall mount guard over every outlet from the house, and seize her as she issues."

"No, no," objected Vinicius.

"Then what would you prefer to do, my lord?"

"This. We will follow her *into* the house, and carry her off then and there. You know your part, Croto, do you not?"

"Yes, my lord; and I will undertake to become your slave if I do not break the loins of that buffalo who is guarding her."

By all the gods, however, Chilo advised his companions not to act thus. Croto, he said, had been brought with them merely for the purpose of defence, in case they should be recognised; not for that of carrying off the girl. By attempting to seize her unassisted, they would expose themselves to death, as well as, it might be, see her escape

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them, when she would once more conceal herself, or leave Rome altogether. What would they do *then*? Why should they not adopt a sure and certain course? What would be the use of exposing themselves and compromising the issue of the enterprise?

Although obliged to make a tremendous effort against his longing to seize Lygia in his arms—to seize her then and there in the cemetery—Vinicius felt that the Greek was right. In fact, he might have listened to his advice but for Croto, who was thinking of his promised reward.

"My lord," said the wrestler, "tell this old fool to hold his tongue; or else let me tap him on the head with my fist. One day, at Buxentum, where Lucius Saturninus had engaged me to take part in the games, seven drunken gladiators attacked me in a tavern; yet not a single one of them got away with a whole skin. I do not say that we need seize the young girl *immediately*, in the midst of this crowd, for they might throw stones at us, and break our legs; but I do say that, once she has arrived home, I intend to carry her off, and to take her whithersoever you may wish."

"Yes, it shall be so, by Hercules!" declared Vinicius.

"But," groaned Chilo, "the Lygian appears to me to be terribly strong."

"Even if he is so," retorted Croto, "it will not be *your* duty to hold his hands."

However, they still had some time to wait, for it was not until the cocks had crowed to announce the coming of dawn that Ursus and Lygia issued from the gate. With them came a few persons among whom Chilo seemed to recognise the Great Apostle, as well as another old man of shorter stature, two aged women, and a young boy who was playing the part of lantern-bearer. Behind this little group walked a crowd of some two hundred Christians; among whom Vinicius, Croto, and Chilo hastened to conceal themselves.

"Yes, my lord," remarked the Greek. "This maiden of yours is under powerful protection, for that is the Great Apostle who is walking with her. Look! The people who preceded them are kneeling down before him!"

Daylight was appearing, and a morning glow was faintly tingeing the summits of the buildings, while the trees, the walls, and the funeral monuments which bordered the road were just emerging from shadow. The road itself was almost deserted, although a few vendors of vegetables, driving before them mules and asses that were laden with kitchen produce, were hurrying towards the city, with the object of arriving there as soon as the gates opened. Here

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and there also could be heard the creak of a cart laden with game. A light mist—the harbinger of a fine day—was creeping upwards, and through it human beings looked like phantoms. Never for a moment, however, did Vinicius lose sight of Lygia's slender figure.

"My lord," said Chilo, "once more I advise you, as soon as you have learnt where the divine Lygia is lodging, to return to your own mansion, and there to order out a party of slaves and a litter, rather than listen to that elephant's trunk, Croto, who has undertaken to remove the young girl merely in order that he may squeeze your purse as one might squeeze a bag of curds."

"Take care that you do not receive a blow of the fist between the shoulder-blades," said Croto. "If you did so, it would mean the end of you."

"And do *you* take care that you do not receive a bottle of Cephalonian wine," replied Chilo. "Which is as good as saying that no such thing as you speak of will happen to me."

By this time they were approaching the city gate. There a curious spectacle met their eyes—namely, the spectacle of two soldiers kneeling at the feet of the Apostle, who, after laying his hands upon their brazen helmets, blessed them with the sign of the cross. Never before had it occurred to the mind of the young patrician that he would encounter Christians in the Roman army; and the circumstance led him to reflect on the amazing power of propagation which this doctrine evidently possessed. If Lygia had wished to flee the city, she would have found the road guarded by sentinels who would have closed their eyes to her!

After passing the vacant lands which lay within the city walls, the little bands of Christians began to disperse in different directions. This made it necessary to follow Lygia at a greater distance, and with more circumspection. In this manner they proceeded until they had crossed the Tiber and the time was just upon sunrise; when suddenly the group of whom Lygia formed one broke up into two portions—the Apostle, the old women, and the boy continuing to follow the river, and the shorter old man, with Lygia and Ursus, turning off into a narrow street, and thence, after walking another hundred paces, entering the vestibule of a house the ground floor of which was constituted of the shops of an oilman and of a bird-catcher.

Chilo, who had been following Croto and Vinicius at a distance of about fifty paces, came to a dead stop, pressed himself against the wall, and called to his companions to return to him. This they did, since they could debate their plans there as well as anywhere else.

"Go and see if the house has an outlet upon any other

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street," said Vinicius; whereupon Chilo, who, a moment before, had been complaining of sores on his feet, set off as quickly as though those feet had been shod with Mercury's wings. Soon he was back again.

"No," he said, "this door is the only one." Then, clasping his hands, he added:

"In the names of Jupiter, Apollo, Vesta, Cybele, Isis, Osiris, Mithra, Baal, and all the gods of the Orient and of the Occident, I implore you, my lord, to abandon this scheme. Listen, I—"

He broke off short on seeing a glare in Vinicius' eyes like the glare in the eyes of a wolf. One glance at the patrician was sufficient to show the Greek that nothing in the world would stop him. As for Croto, he began to inhale the air into his Herculean breast, and to move his rudimentary jowl from side to side like a caged bear. On *his* features, at least, there was no anxiety.

"I will go in first," he said.

"No, you will follow *me*," replied Vinicius in a tone of command.

With that they disappeared into the dark passage, while Chilo rushed to the corner of the street, and remained crouching down in an agony of perturbation.

XXII

ONCE in the passage, Vinicius grasped, for the first time, the difficulties of the enterprise. The house was a block of tenements several storeys high—one of those hastily constructed Roman warrens which, at once too lofty and too confined, were full of little dens and corners in which there lived a mass of destitute population. In this city, where many of the streets were left unnamed, such buildings bore no numbers—their proprietors entrusting the collection of the rents to slaves, who, not being obliged to furnish the municipal authorities with the names of the tenants, frequently omitted to inquire even their patronymics. Consequently it was always a difficult matter to obtain information concerning a given denizen of such abodes, and the more so when no porter was stationed at the main entrance.

Following the passage, Vinicius and Croto arrived at a narrow, well-like sort of courtyard, which formed a common atrium for the lodgers, and had in its centre a fountain playing in the midst of a heavily carved stone basin. Along the walls of this court there ran a number of stair-

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cases which, built partly of stone and partly of wood, led to galleries whence entrance could be obtained to the various tenements. On the ground-level also there were tenements, of which a certain proportion were provided with doors of wood, while the remainder were separated from the courtyard only by torn, shoddy, much-bepatched curtains.

The hour was still early, and not a soul was to be seen in the courtyard. Evidently every one was asleep except those who had returned from Ostrianum.

"What are we going to do, my lord?" asked Croto, stopping short.

"To wait here," replied Vinicius. "Perhaps some one will appear presently. We must not be seen in this court."

At the same time he reflected that Chilo's scheme would have been more practical. Had he only had at his disposal some fifty or so slaves, he could have put a guard over the door which appeared to be the one outlet, and then searched every tenement in turn; whereas now he would have to pitch precisely upon the tenement occupied by Lygia, unless he wished the Christians in the building (and they might be very numerous) to give the alarm. From the same point of view it was dangerous to question strangers. Consequently Vinicius ended by asking himself whether he would not do better to go and fetch his slaves.

Just at that moment a man came from behind a curtain which veiled one of the furthest tenements, and approached the fountain with a dipping-bowl.

"It is the Lygian," murmured Vinicius.

"Then shall I break his bones straight away?"

"No. Wait a moment."

Ursus had not seen them, for they were standing in the shadow of the passage. Consequently he proceeded quietly to wash some vegetables which he had in his bowl. This task performed, he departed, and the curtain closed again behind him. Instantly Vinicius and Croto darted towards the door in question, expecting that they would at once find themselves in Lygia's lodging. What, therefore, was their surprise when they discovered that the curtain gave entrance, not to a tenement at all, but to a second dark passage, at the end of which there was visible a garden containing a few cypress trees, several bushes of myrtles, and a hut built against the basement wall! No other dwelling was in view.

At once the two men understood that the circumstance was all in their favour. In the courtyard the inhabitants might easily have assembled together, but here the isolation of the hut made the enterprise the simpler.

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Ursus was about to re-enter the little dwelling when the sound of footsteps struck upon his ear. He stopped short, and, seeing two men in the distance, deposited his bowl upon a balustrade, and turned towards the visitors.

"For whom are you looking?" he asked them.

"For yourself," replied Vinicius. Then, aside to Croto, the young patrician added: "Kill him!"

Croto bounded forward like a tiger, and, before the Lygian had had time to withdraw or to recognise his enemies, seized him in his arms of steel. Of the almost superhuman strength of the wrestler Vinicius felt too assured to make it necessary for him to await the issue of the struggle; so, passing the two men, he rushed towards the hut, pushed open the door, and found himself in a room which, though dark, was to a certain extent lit by a fire in the chimney. The light of the flames fell full upon the form of Lygia. In addition, there was seated beside the hearth the old man who had accompanied the young girl and Ursus from Ostrianum.

In a moment Vinicius had seized Lygia by the waist, and rushed towards the door. Claspings the girl to his breast with one arm, with the other he repulsed the old man when the latter sought to bar his way; but the action of doing so caused the hood to slip from his head, and Lygia, seeing a face which she knew well and greatly dreaded, felt her blood run cold. She tried to call for help, but could not. She tried also to catch at the doorpost, but her fingers slipped on the stonework, and she would have lost consciousness but for the frightful spectacle which greeted her eyes and shook her nerves as Vinicius rushed with her into the garden.

Ursus was holding in his arms a man whose head had been bent backwards until it touched his heels. From the mouth there was dripping blood. At the sight of the newcomers the Lygian administered a last blow with his fist to the dangling head, and then, in a twinkling, seized Vinicius as though the latter had been a fawn.

"Death has come!" thought the young patrician.

As in a dream he heard Lygia cry out, "Do not kill him, Ursus!" and felt something like a thunderbolt disengage his arms from the young girl's waist. Then everything seemed to swim before his eyes, and the very light of day went out.

Meanwhile Chilo, hidden behind the angle of the wall, was anxiously awaiting developments, yet allowing curiosity to contend with fear. Should the enterprise succeed, thought he, he would do well to keep near Vinicius, although he no longer felt afraid of Urban, whom Croto was sure to kill.

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And if the Christians should dare to gather in the still deserted streets, and offer resistance to Vinicius, he (Chilo) would give them the pass-word under pretext of being a representative of authority, an executor of Cæsar's will. Indeed, in the last resort he would call upon the city watchmen to come to the assistance of the young patrician against the street populace; by which course of action he would win new favours from his patron.

Yet the time seemed to him very long. He could not reconcile himself to the stillness that was everywhere, but kept his eyes fixed upon the passage.

"If they do not find her hiding-place," thought he, "or if they should make a noise, she will get clear away."

Yet this supposition was not really disagreeable to him, for in that case he would once more be necessary to Vinicius, and able to bleed him for many another sestertius.

"Whatever they may be doing," he murmured, "it is for me that they are working—there can be no doubt of that. Yet, ye gods, ye gods, permit me only to—"

He said no more, for something had just protruded from the passage-way. He flattened himself against the wall, and gazed with bated breath.

Yes, he had been right! A head *had* stuck itself half-way out of the passage, and examined the surroundings!

"It is either Vinicius or Croto," thought the Greek. "But if they have got hold of the young girl, why is it that she does not scream? And why does he scan the street so carefully? For all their precautions, they are bound to meet some one, since long before they can reach the Carinæ the whole city will be awake. But what is this? By the immortal gods!" And Chilo's scanty hair stood up on end.

For in the aperture of the passage-way there had just come into view the figure of Ursus, carrying on his shoulder Croto's lifeless body. Presently, having once more glanced to every side of him, the Lygian directed his steps towards the river.

Chilo glued himself to the wall like a dab of mud.

"If he should see me, I am a dead man," was his thought.

But Ursus passed him by, and disappeared behind the neighbouring building; whereupon Chilo, without further hesitation, darted to the bottom of the next street, with an agility which would have surprised even a man in his prime.

"If he perceives me as he returns, he will catch and kill me," said the Greek to himself. "Come to my aid, O Zeus!—to my aid, O Apollo and Hermes!—to my aid, thou god of the Christians! I will leave Rome and go to

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Mesembria, if only that will save me from the hands of this demon."

Indeed, to Chilo this Lygian who had slain Croto seemed a supernatural being, or else a god who had assumed the form of a barbarian. Since Chilo at present believed in all the deities that existed in the world, it even occurred to him that the slayer of Croto might be the god of the Christians himself.

It was only after the Greek had traversed several streets and caught sight of some workmen walking in his direction that he grew calmer. His breath was failing him, so he sat down to rest on the threshold of a house, and wiped the sweat from his brow with his sleeve.

"I am old, and need a quiet life," he groaned.

The men who had been coming towards him had turned aside into an adjacent alley, and he found himself once more alone. The city was still asleep. Morning life began early in the richer quarters, where the slaves of the great houses had to rise at daylight; whilst in the quarters tenanted by the free population (which lived on the revenues of the State, and was therefore sluggish) people awoke much later, more especially in the winter time. Chilo could feel the freshness of the early morning penetrating into his frame; wherefore he rose, and, making sure that he had not lost the purse which he had received from Vinicius, directed his already lagging footsteps towards the river.

"Perhaps I shall see there a portion of Croto's body," he said to himself. "Ye gods, but if this Lygian were a mere mortal he could win thousands and thousands of sesterii in a year; for who could resist a man who has strangled Croto as one might strangle a dog? Each time that he appeared in the arena he would be given his weight in gold. Consequently he is able to guard this young girl as Cerberus guards the Inferno. May the Inferno swallow him up! For my part, I have no wish to have any dealings with him. His bones are too hard. Well, what is to be done now? This is a horrible affair. If the Lygian can break the bones of a fellow like Croto, it is more than probable that Vinicius' soul also is groaning down there—somewhere below that cursed house—and awaiting its funeral rites. By Castor, yet Vinicius was a patrician, and a friend of Cæsar's, and a relative of Petronius', and a man known to all Rome, and a military tribune! Consequently his death will not at least go unpunished. If I were to run to the camp of the prætorian guards, or to seek out the city watchmen, I—"

He reflected a moment, and then continued:

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" Ah, woe is me! Who was it led him to that house if it was not I? His slaves and his freedmen know that I came to see him last night; and some of them even know for what purpose I did so. What if they were to suspect me of having shown him the house where he has met with his death? He was a patrician, and therefore I could not possibly escape punishment."

In every way things had turned out badly, and Chilo's chief anxiety was to choose the least of these many evils. Rome was a huge city; yet he knew full well that it might soon become too small for him. Another than he might have gone to the commander of the city watchmen with the story of what had happened, and, even though suspected, might have calmly awaited the result of the inquiry; but Chilo could not afford to call attention to his person, since his past had been too fruitful of adventure.

On the other hand, to flee would be to confirm Petronius in his supposition that Vinicius had been trapped and assassinated; and Petronius was an important personage who could set in motion the police of the whole empire, and track a guilty man to the ends of the earth. Yet Chilo kept asking himself whether it would not be better to seek him out, and to tell him all. Yes, it *would* be the better plan, for Petronius was a man of cool temperament who would hear a story to the end. Moreover, having been conversant with the affair from its inception, he would believe in Chilo's innocence more readily than would the officials.

Yet before going to see Petronius it was necessary to ascertain exactly what had befallen Vinicius; and that Chilo did not know. He had seen the Lygian carrying Croto's body towards the river, but that was all. Vinicius *might* have been killed, but also he might only have been wounded, or taken captive. Suddenly, in this connection, it occurred to Chilo that the Christians would be most unlikely to kill a personage so powerful—a personage who was both an Augustan and a high functionary, seeing that a crime of that sort would draw down upon them a general persecution. Far more probable was it that they were holding him prisoner, in order that Lygia might have time to conceal herself in some other retreat.

" If the Lygian dragon did not tear him in pieces in his first transport of rage, Vinicius is alive; and if he is alive he himself will bear witness that I did not betray him; whereupon I shall not only have nothing to fear, but also—O Hermes, you may safely count upon your two heifers, for a new field will open before me. Yes, I shall go and tell one of Vinicius' freedmen where his master is; but whether he goes, thereafter, to seek the prefect or not will be his own

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affair. Also, I mean to go to Petronius, and to get a reward out of him. Even as until now I have been seeking Lygia, so now I will start to seek Vinicius; after which I shall be able to search once more for the Lygian maiden. Beyond all things, though, I must get to know whether Vinicius is alive or dead."

Then it came into his mind that it might be well for him to go, under cover of night, to Demas' factory, and there to question Ursus; but he dismissed the idea almost as soon as he had thought of it. He would rather have nothing to do with Ursus. "If Ursus has not killed Glaucus, it is because one of his Christian superiors to whom he has referred the matter has shown him that the scheme is only a plot hatched by a traitor." For the rest, Chilo's teeth chattered at the very thought of the Lygian giant. Next, he told himself that that night he would send Euricius to make inquiries in the building where these events had taken place. In the meanwhile he, Chilo, needed something to eat, to have a bath, and to rest himself a little; for the sleepless night, the walk to Ostrianum, and the flight from the Trans-Tiberian quarter had thoroughly worn him out.

One thing, however, comforted him: and that was the fact that he still had upon him his two purses—the one that Vinicius had given him before their departure, and the one that he had had thrown at him when they were returning from the cemetery. In view, therefore, of this favourable circumstance, as well as of the fact that he had passed through much anguish of mind, he resolved to eat more generously, and also to drink a better wine, than he was usually accustomed to do.

Accordingly, as soon as the eating-houses opened for business he carried out his intention so earnestly as altogether to forget the matter of the bath. Above all things he was needing some sleep, and the want of it had so enfeebled his frame that he was actually staggering when at length he reached his dwelling in the Suburra, and found awaiting him the female slave whom he had bought with Vinicius' money.

Dragging himself to the cubiculum, he threw himself upon his bed, and was asleep in the twinkling of an eye. In fact, it was evening when he awoke—or, rather, when he was awakened by his slave, who came to rouse him with a message that a visitor on urgent business had called.

In a moment the watchful Chilo was sober. Hastily throwing a hooded cloak over his shoulders, he ventured to peep out of the cubiculum, and saw before him the gigantic outline of Ursus!

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Chilo felt his limbs, and then his head, grow cold as ice, his heart cease to beat, and thousands of ants begin running down his back.

"Syra," he whispered to the slave, "I am not in. I do not know—this—this good gentleman."

"But I have already told him that you are in, though asleep," replied the girl; "whereupon he said that I must awake you."

"Ye gods! Oh, I will give you such a—!"

At this moment Ursus—doubtless impatient at the delay—approached the door of the cubiculum, and, leaning forward, thrust his head within.

"Chilo Chilonides," he said.

"Peace be with you—peace, peace!" replied Chilo. "Yes, peace be with you, O best of Christians! True, I am Chilo, but there has been some mistake, and I do not know you."

"Chilo Chilonides," repeated Ursus, "your master Vini-cius is asking for you, and desires you to accompany me to the place where he is."

PART II

I

A PANG of agony awakened Vinicius to find three men bending over him. Two of them he recognised, for they were Ursus and the old man whom he had thrown to the ground as he was carrying off Lygia; while the third man was holding him up and probing his left arm. The pain was so excruciating that Vinicius, in the belief that some terrible vengeance was being wreaked upon him, said between his clenched teeth:

"Kill me at once!"

Yet the men appeared to pay no attention to his words. The terrible Ursus, whose rude face now expressed only contrition, went on holding in his hands a packet of bandages, while the old man said to the one who was handling Vinicius' arm:

"Glaucus, are you sure that this wound to the head will not prove mortal?"

"Yes, good Crispus. In freeing the young girl, the giant"—here he pointed to Ursus—"threw the aggressor against the wall, and the latter was saved by the fact that he fell upon his arm. True, the arm is fractured and dislocated, but the wound to the head is a light one."

"Well, you have treated more than one of our brethren," said Crispus, "and have the reputation of being a skilful physician. That is why I sent Ursus to fetch you."

"And on the way he told me that but yesterday he was prepared to kill me!"

"Yes, he has acquainted me with his scheme, and I who know you, and know also your love for Christ, have made him understand that it is not *you* who played the traitor, but the unknown who tried to instigate him to murder you."

"The unknown must be an evil spirit," put in Ursus. "Yet I took him for an angel!"

"Of that you shall tell me at another time," said Glaucus. "For the moment we must attend to our patient."

The operation over, Vinicius, who had again lost consciousness, awoke. Near his bed there was standing Lygia, with a water-jug in her hands; while from time to time Glaucus was dipping a sponge into the jug, and bathing the head of the wounded man.

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"Lygia!" murmured Vinicius.

The jug trembled in her hands as she turned her sad eyes in his direction.

"Peace be with you," she said in a low voice.

"Lygia, is it you who prevented them from killing me?"

She replied gently:

"May God restore you your health."

A sort of overpowering, yet pleasant, faintness came over him. He felt as though he were falling into an abyss, yet enjoying the sensation, while over him there floated a divine being.

By this time Glaucus had washed the head wound, and was applying ointment to it. Presently Lygia held a cup of wine, mixed with water, to the patient's lips, and he drank greedily. Now that the dressing of the wound had been completed, the pain had almost disappeared.

"Give me something more to drink," he said; whereupon Lygia departed to another room to refill the cup, and Crispus, after exchanging a few words with Glaucus, approached the bed.

"Vinicius," said he, "God has not permitted you to commit an evil deed, but is preserving your life in order that you may think over what you have done. He before whom man is as dust has delivered you helpless into our hands. But Christ, in whom we believe, has bade us love our enemies; and for this reason we have dressed your wounds, and will restore you to health, although we cannot watch over you much longer. As soon as you find yourself alone, ask of yourself whether you ought to continue your persecution of Lygia, who, through your fault, has been deprived of her protectors and her home. Ask yourself also whether you ought to persecute us who have returned you good for evil."

"Are you going to abandon me?" inquired Vinicius.

"We are going to leave this house, since in it the city prefect and his men might arrest us. Your companion has been killed, and you yourself are lying wounded. Of these facts we are not guilty, yet it is we against whom the law will direct its rigour."

"Nay; fear not persecution," replied Vinicius. "I myself will protect you."

Crispus hesitated to say that he felt an equal measure of distrust of the speaker.

"My lord," he went on, "your right hand is still serviceable. Here are tablets and a stylus. Take them, and write to your servants that to-night they bring a litter and bear you to your home. Here you are in the house of a poor widow who, with her son, cannot afford to remain

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without a shelter. Her son shall convey the letter for you, while we ourselves will seek another refuge."

Vinicius turned pale. If he were to lose Lygia again, perhaps he would never recover her. He longed desperately to become reconciled to her, and such an arrangement would not afford him the requisite time.

"Listen to me, good Christians," he said. "Last night I was with you at Ostrianum, and heard an exposition of your doctrine; and though I may not have learnt it aright, your acts alone convince me that you are good and honourable folk. Tell the widow to remain here in this dwelling, and do you yourselves remain here, and permit me to do the same. Also, let this man, who is a physician, or at least knows how to dress wounds, say whether I am fit to be moved. I know that my broken arm ought to remain motionless for several days at least; wherefore I declare that, unless you expel me by force, I shall decline to leave the place."

He ceased to speak, for his breath was failing him. Then Crispus said:

"No one, my lord, is going to employ force against you. We are departing merely in order to save our lives."

At this Vinicius, who was but little used to encountering resistance, contracted his brows in a frown. Then he continued:

"This Croto whom Ursus has strangled will never be inquired for. To-day he was to have left for Beneventum, on the summons of Vatinius; wherefore every one will suppose that he has departed thither. Moreover, when we entered this building no one saw us do so save a Greek who had accompanied us to Ostrianum. I will tell you where the Greek lives, so that you can have him sent for, and I will enjoin upon him silence, since he is in my employ. Also, I will write to my household that I am going to Beneventum; and, should the Greek already have warned the prefect, I shall make oath that it was I who killed Croto, and he who broke my arm. By the shades of my father and of my mother, that is what I intend to do. Consequently you can remain here, and remain in safety. Only bring me the Greek with all speed. His name is Chilonides."

"Then, my lord, Glaucus shall remain with you, and help the widow to attend to your wants," said Crispus.

"Nay, old man," replied Vinicius. "I pray you hear me out. I owe you some recognition, and have confidence in what you say; but you have not yet told me what lies behind your words. You fear, do you not, that I shall summon my slaves, and order them to remove Lygia?"

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"Yes," replied Crispus sternly.

"Then listen here. I will speak to Chilo in your presence, and in your presence write a letter to the effect that I am departing out of the city. Also, in future I will use no messengers but yourselves. Consider what I say, and do not anger me further."

Here his wrath burst all bonds, and his whole form contracted with passion as he exclaimed:

"Think you that I am going to forego my desire, which is that I should rest here and continue to see Lygia? Yet I no longer wish to take her by force, and will even add that, should she depart, with this sound hand of mine will I strip the bandages from my arm, and refuse to take either food or drink. And in that case may my death recoil upon you and your brethren! For what purpose have you tended me — for what purpose have you spared me my life?"

At this moment Lygia re-entered the room, and, approaching Crispus, said in a voice so inspired that it seemed an echo of another and a greater voice:

"Crispus, let us keep him here amongst us, and not leave him until Christ has restored him to health."

"It shall be as you desire."

Upon Vinicius this prompt submission on the part of Crispus made a great impression, for it seemed to him that the Christians regarded her as a sort of sibyl or priestess who must be respected and obeyed. He too felt a respect for her; and when, a moment later, she gave him some water and he yearned to kiss her hand, he dared not do so. No, he, Vinicius, who in Nero's palace had kissed her on the lips; he, who, subsequently, had sworn to drag her by the hair to his cubiculum or to flog her—he dared not kiss her hand!

II

VINICIUS had noticed with astonishment that, from the moment when Lygia had interceded in his favour, neither she nor Crispus had demanded of him any undertaking, as though they were certain that, in case of need, a supernatural force would come to their assistance. Indeed, since the time when, at Ostrianum, he had heard the preaching and the story of the Apostle, the boundary-line between the possible and the impossible had begun to grow dim in Vinicius' brain, and he no longer hesitated to admit that intervention of that kind was not wholly improbable. However, after calmer consideration of matters, he reminded

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his hosts of what he had said about the Greek, and once more demanded that they should send for him.

To this Crispus consented. Vinicius told the Lygian exactly where Chilo's dwelling was situated, and, after writing a few words on the tablets, said as he turned to Ursus:

"I am giving you these tablets for the reason that Chilo is a cunning, distrustful man who, when sent for by me, often replies that he is not at home. He does so whenever he has not good news for me and is afraid of my anger."

"Whether he be willing or unwilling, I will bring him with me," replied Ursus as, donning his mantle, he hastily left the room.

Yet when the Lygian found himself in Chilo's presence he failed to recognise him, for he had seen him only once before, and that at night time. Moreover, the boastful, self-assured old man who had bidden Ursus go and put Glaucus to death had borne but small resemblance to this craven, crouching Greek. However, Chilo soon recovered from his first agitation, and the tablets helped to reassure him the more. At least he would never be suspected of having led the tribune into a trap. Likewise he told himself that if the Christians had not put Vinicius to death it had been because they had not dared to raise their hands against a personage of such importance.

"From this it follows," thought the Greek, "that, if need be, Vinicius also will protect me. He would not have asked for me merely in order to do me an injury."

Then, his courage recovered, he inquired:

"My good man, has not my friend, the noble Vinicius, sent a litter for my conveyance? My feet are swollen, and I cannot walk a great distance."

"No," replied Ursus. "We shall have to proceed thither on foot."

"But what if I refuse to do so?"

"Do not refuse, for your presence is required."

"Oh, I am coming, but only of my own free will. No one could force me to do so, for I am a free man, as well as a friend of the city prefect. Also, as a wise man, I have at my command certain methods of resisting violence, and am able to change men into trees and animals. However, I will go, I will go. Only, first I must fetch a warmer cloak and a hood, so that the slaves of that quarter may not recognise me. If they were to do so, they would be for ever stopping to kiss my hands."

So he put on another cloak, and battened down a huge Gallic hood over his head, for fear Ursus should remember his features as soon as the pair issued into daylight.

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"Whither are you taking me?" Chilo inquired as they walked along.

"To the other side of the Tiber."

"Well, I have not been long in Rome, nor have I ever visited that quarter, but doubtless it contains some friends of virtue like ourselves."

Though a simple man, Ursus knew that the Greek had accompanied Vinicius to the cemetery of Ostrianum, as well as approached the building where Lygia dwelt. Consequently he came to an abrupt halt.

"Do not lie, old man," he said. "This very day you were with Vinicius at Ostrianum, and at our own door as well."

"Ah, yes. So your house is situated on the other side of the Tiber? As I say, I have not been long in Rome, and am apt to confuse the names of the different quarters. Yes, my friend, I *have* been to your door; and it was there that in virtue's name I adjured Vinicius not to enter. Also, I was at Ostrianum last night; and do you know why? It is that for some time past I have been working for the conversion of Vinicius, and greatly wished him to hear the senior of the Apostles. May light penetrate both into his soul and into yours! Are you not a Christian, and therefore desirous of witnessing the triumph of truth over falsehood?"

"Yes," replied Ursus humbly.

This completely restored Chilo's courage.

"Vinicius," said he, "is a powerful lord and a friend of Cæsar's. True, he obeys, at times, the promptings of the Evil One; but were a single hair to fall from his head, Cæsar would wreak vengeance upon all the Christians in Rome."

"But we have a superior power to defend us."

"That is so, that is so," assented Chilo, growing uneasy again. "Yet what do you intend to do with Vinicius?"

"I do not know. Christ has commanded us to have mercy."

"You have said well. Remember that always, if you do not wish to fry in the infernal regions like a sausage in a saucepan."

Ursus sighed, and Chilo reflected that he could do what he liked with this terrible fellow. Desiring, next, to learn how things had gone since the removal of Lygia, he continued in a severely judicial tone:

"What have you done with Croto? Speak, and do not lie."

Ursus sighed again.

"Vinicius will tell you," he said.

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"Which means that you have either stabbed to death or bludgeoned the wrestler?"

"I was unarmed at the time."

The Greek could not altogether repress his astonishment at the barbarian's superhuman strength.

"By Pluto," he exclaimed, "—that is to say, by Christ, but may you be pardoned for this!"

For a while they continued their way in silence. Then Chilo said:

"I shall not betray you, but do you beware of the city watchmen."

"It is Christ whom I fear—not the city watchmen."

"And rightly so. There is no greater sin than murder. I will pray for you, but if you wish my prayers to be efficacious you must take a vow never again to touch a human being, even with the tips of your fingers, for the rest of your life."

"I did not kill him on purpose," rejoined Ursus.

Nevertheless Chilo, whose aim it was to secure himself against any untoward incident, continued to represent to the barbarian that murder was an abomination, and that he must promise to take the vow just referred to.

Thus conversing, they arrived at the house; whereupon Chilo's heart began once more to beat uncasily. Indeed, in his terror he thought that Ursus was casting ferocious glances at him.

"It would be poor consolation for me to think that he had not killed me on purpose," reflected the Greek. "I would rather he were struck, first, with paralysis—and every Lygian with him. Grant this my prayer, O Jupiter, if you possibly can."

And he muffled himself still closer in his Gallic cloak, on the plea that he was afraid of the cold. When, at length, after passing through the vestibule and the outer court of the building, they entered the passage which opened into the little garden of the place, the Greek said:

"Permit me to draw breath. Otherwise I shall be powerless either to interview Vinicius or to accord him salutary counsel."

With that he came to a halt; and, in very truth, though telling himself that no danger threatened him, he could feel his heart sinking at the very thought of being once more among the mysterious people whom he had seen at Ostrianum.

From the little hut there came the sound of singing.

"What is that?" he inquired.

"Do you profess to be a Christian," Ursus retorted, "yet know not that after each meal we are accustomed

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to glorify our Saviour in hymns? Doubtless Miriam and her son have returned, and perhaps the Apostle also is with them, since every day he visits the widow and Crispus."

"Then take me straight to Vinicius."

In the room everything was in semi-darkness, for, without, a gloomy winter's eve had fallen, and the flame of the lamps did little to lighten the obscurity. In the hooded individual Vinicius divined rather than recognised the Greek, but Chilo caught sight of a bed, and, on that bed, Vinicius; wherefore he moved straight towards his patron, in the belief that he would be safest while by Vinicius' side.

"Oh, my lord, why did you not follow my advice?" he cried with clasped hands.

"Be silent, thou," retorted Vinicius, "and listen."

Then, with his keen eyes transfixing Chilo, he continued slowly, and with a pause after each word, as though he wished each several utterance to be taken as an order, and to be engraved for ever on the Greek's memory:

"Croto threw himself upon me, and tried to rob and assassinate me. Do you understand? I then killed him, and these good people here have dressed the wounds which I received in the struggle."

Instantly Chilo guessed that, for Vinicius to speak thus, he must have come to an understanding with the Christians, and wished his words to be believed. This was shown also by his expression.

That being so, Chilo evinced no doubt or surprise, but exclaimed:

"Ah, he was a rascal indeed! Always did I advise you not to trust that man, my lord; but my words had no effect. Nowhere in Hades could there be found a punishment meet for his deserts. To attack his benefactor—a lord so generous as yourself! By Pollux!"

Suddenly the speaker recollected that on the way thither he had represented to Ursus that he, Chilo, was a Christian. He came to a full stop.

"But for the sica which I had upon my person, he would have slain me," continued Vinicius.

"Then I bless the moment when I recommended you to arm yourself at least with a knife."

Vinicius turned upon him a look of inquiry, and demanded:

"What have you been doing to-day?"

"What? Have I not told you, my lord, that I have been offering up prayers for your safety?"

"And nothing more?"

"And making preparations for paying you this visit,

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after that this good fellow had come to tell me that you required my presence."

"Oh! Now, here is a tablet. Go to my house, and hand that tablet to my head freedman. On the tablet I have written that I am departing for Beneventum. To this you will add that my departure took place this morning, on receipt of a pressing letter from Petronius."

Then he repeated with emphasis:

"Remember that I have left for Beneventum. Do you understand?"

"Yes, my lord. You have departed, and I have bid you farewell, this morning, at the Porta Capena; and since that moment such sadness has come upon me that, unless your generosity should see to it, I shall die of sobbing, even as sobbed the unhappy wife of Zethos after the death of Itylos."

Ill as he was, as well as accustomed to the Greek's nimbleness of mind, Vinicius could not repress a smile. Moreover, satisfied that Chilo had understood what he had intended to convey, the young patrician added:

"Well, I will write also a few lines of the kind, to help you to dry your tears. Give me the lamp."

Chilo, now completely reassured, rose, and removed from the wall one of the lighted lanterns. Unfortunately the movement caused the hood to slip from his head, and the light to fall full upon his face. Instantly Glaucus leapt from his seat, and planted himself in front of Chilo.

"Do you not recognise me, Cephas?" he asked: and in his voice there was something so terrible that all who were present shuddered.

Chilo raised the lamp, and as instantly let it fall. Then he bent himself double, and groaned:

"I am not Cephas! It is not I! Have mercy upon me!"

"Before you there stands the man who sold me!" said Glaucus to his companions. "Yes, *there* stands the man who ruined me and all my family!"

In an instant Vinicius understood that the physician who had dressed his wounds was the Glaucus with whose history he had been made acquainted.

As for Ursus, those few moments, added to Glaucus' words, had shed a light upon the darkness of his brain. He too recognised Chilo, and, seizing his arms, bent them backwards.

"Yes," he cried; "and this is the man who persuaded me to kill Glaucus."

"Have pity upon me!" groaned Chilo. "My lord, save me! Intercede for me! I know that you will do so! I will take your letter! Oh my lord, my lord!"

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But Vinicius did not care what happened. In the first place, he was aware of all that the Greek had done, while, in the second place, his heart was inaccessible to pity. All that he said was:

"You can bury him in the garden, and some one else shall take the letter."

To Chilo these words seemed his death sentence. In Ursus' terrible embrace his bones were beginning to crack, and his eyes to fill with tears.

"In the name of your God, have mercy upon me!" he cried again. "I am a Christian! Peace be with you! I am a Christian, I say; and if you do not believe me, baptise me afresh—baptise me twice, or even ten times, if you like! Glaucus, a mistake has been made! Let me speak! Make me your slave if you wish! Only do not kill me! Mercy, mercy!"

His voice, half-stifled with agony, was growing feebler and feebler. Suddenly, on the further side of the table, the Apostle Peter showed himself to those present, and said amid a dead silence:

"The Saviour has given us the commandment, 'If thy brother hath sinned against thee, chastise thou him; but if he should repent, pardon thou him. And even if he hath sinned against thee seven times in the day, yet seven times hath turned to thee, saying, "Have mercy upon me!" then pardon thou him.'"

The silence grew still deeper. For a long moment Glaucus stood with his face buried in his hands. Then he said:

"Cephas, may God pardon you the wrongs that you have done me, even as I pardon them in the name of Christ."

Ursus also, releasing Chilo's arms, said:

"May the Saviour pardon me, even as I pardon you."

Chilo sank to the ground, where, resting on his hands, he turned his head from side to side like an animal that has been caught in a net and is looking desperately to see from what quarter the dreaded death is approaching. He could not, as yet, believe his eyes or ears; he dared not hope that he had really been reprieved.

Little by little, however, he recovered himself, although his bloodless lips still quivered with terror. At length the Apostle said to him:

"Go in peace!"

Chilo rose, but could not speak. Instinctively he approached Vinicius' bed, as though to implore the tribune's help. He had not had time to remember that it was Vinicius who had condemned him, who had been to a certain extent his accomplice, who had made use of him,

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although those against whom he had been conspiring had restored him his life. For the moment, therefore, Chilo's gaze expressed only astonishment at and distrust of his companions. Though he saw that he was to be released, he was eager to get safe and sound out of the hands of these incomprehensible people whose goodness frightened him almost as much as their cruelty might have done. In short, he had an idea that, should he remain there any longer, things might happen to him which he could not foresee.

"Give me the letter, my lord," he muttered. "Give me the letter."

Seizing the tablet which Vinicius tendered him, he bowed to the Christians, and then to the patient; after which, in a crouching position, he crept along the wall to the door, and disappeared precipitately into the open air.

In the darkness of the little garden terror caused his hair to bristle anew, for he felt certain that Ursus was about to fall upon him, and to kill him under cover of the night. He would have taken to his heels, but his legs refused their office—they slackened their pace until he had come to a standstill; for, true enough, Ursus had suddenly appeared by his side!

Chilo fell upon his face, and groaned aloud, "Ursus, Ursus—in the name of Christ!" But the giant merely replied:

"Do not fear. The Apostle has commanded me to accompany you to the entrance, in order that you may not lose your way in the darkness. If you have not the strength to walk I will carry you to your dwelling."

Chilo raised his head.

"What say you?" he asked. "What? You are not going to kill me?"

"No; and if, just now, I seized you too roughly, and hurt your bones, you must pardon me."

"Help me to rise," said the Greek. "So you are not going to put me to death? Then lead me back to the street, and, after that, I will go alone."

Ursus raised him as though he had been a feather, and conducted him through a dark passage to a second court—thence to the vestibule which gave upon the street. In the passage Chilo kept repeating to himself, "It is all up with me," and felt reassured only when they had arrived outside the building. Then he said:

"I will proceed alone now."

"Then may peace go with you!"

"And with you, and with you! Leave me to draw my breath."

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Not until Ursus had disappeared did Chilo breathe more freely. Next, he touched his back and sides to make sure that he was still alive. Finally he moved away.

Fifty paces on he stopped and said to himself:

"But why did they not kill me?"

And, for all his discussions with Euricius on the subject of the Christian doctrine, and for all his conversation with Ursus on the banks of the river, and for all the information which he had gleaned at Ostrianum, he could find no reply to that question.

III

VINICIUS could not account to himself for all that had happened, and was really as much dumfounded as Chilo. That these people should have acted towards him as they had done, and that, instead of revenging themselves for his attack upon them, they should have carefully tended his wounds, could be attributed, in great part, to their doctrine, and still more to Lygia, and most of all to the importance of his person. But their manner of treating Chilo had altogether surpassed what he conceived could be the limit of according pardon to a human being; and, in spite of himself, he kept finding himself confronted with the question, "Why did they not kill the Greek?"

They could have done so with impunity, for Ursus would have buried the body in the garden, or thrown it by night into the Tiber, which, at that period of nocturnal outrages committed by Cæsar himself, had cast up human corpses so often that people had ceased to ask whence the derelicts had come.

Moreover, it seemed to Vinicius not only that the Christians *could* have killed Chilo, but also that they *ought* to have killed him. Pity was not an absolute stranger to the world to which the young patrician belonged—the Athenians had even consecrated an altar to that sentiment, and had long opposed the introduction of gladiatorial contests into their midst, while in Rome itself the sight had been witnessed of defeated warriors being accorded mercy (a case in point being Callicratus, King of the Britons, who, after being taken prisoner, had been loaded with gifts by Claudius, and was now living at large in the city). But, to Vinicius, as to the rest of his fellows, vengeance for a personal injury appeared a sheer matter of equity. At Ostrianum he had heard it preached that one ought to love even one's enemies; but in his opinion this was a theory which could never be applied in practical life.

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"Why," he asked himself once more, "did these Christians not deliver Chilo up to justice if they themselves did not care to put him to death? Why did the Apostle remind them that, though a man be guilty seven times over, seven times should that man be forgiven? And why did Glaucus say to Chilo, 'May God pardon you even as I do'? For Chilo had done him the most terrible wrong."

Indeed, at the mere thought of what he, Vinicius, would do to any one who, for instance, had killed Lygia he felt his blood boil. There were no tortures which he would not have inflicted upon such an assassin. Yet Glaucus had pardoned his enemy! Nay, more—Ursus also had pardoned him—the same Ursus who could with impunity kill whomsoever in Rome he wished, seeing that he had but to assassinate the king of the Grove of Nemora to take his place. Could the gladiator who had assumed that dignity (which no one could claim except he first slew his predecessor) have resisted the man whom even Croto had been powerless to resist?

To all these questions there was but one reply. If the Christians did not kill, it was because they bore within themselves such kindness of soul as had never yet existed on earth, coupled with a love of humanity so infinite that it bade them forget offences, forget their own happiness, forget their own misery—in short, bade them live only for others. For what reward, too, did these people hope? Vinicius had heard it spoken of at Ostrianum, but without grasping its meaning. On the other hand, it seemed to him that these Christians' life on earth—a life which entailed the renunciation, for the benefit of one's neighbour, of all that constituted well-being and pleasure—could only be a miserable one. Also, in addition to his surprise, there was in his estimate of the Christians a shade of pity and a spice of contempt. In them he saw sheep destined, sooner or later, to become food for wolves—and his Roman nature did not admit of allowing oneself to be devoured. Yet one thing struck him forcibly: and that was that after Chilo's departure there beamed upon the face of every one present an expression of profound joy. The Apostle approached Glaucus, laid his hands upon him, and said:

"The Christ in you has triumphed!"

Glaucus raised his eyes to heaven as though a flood of unlooked-for felicity were descending upon him; with the result that Vinicius, who could better have understood the felicity of satisfied vengeance, gazed at the scene with eyes dilated, as though he were contemplating a group of madmen. Also he saw—not without some inward indigna-

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tion—Lygia press her royal lips to the hand of this man who had the mien of a slave. Indeed, the world seemed to be turning upside down. Next, there entered Ursus, who related how he had conducted Chilo back to the street, and had begged his pardon for the damage which he had done to the Greek's frame; whereupon the Apostle bestowed upon Ursus also his blessing. Lastly, Crispus declared that the day had been a day of great victory. Just as he uttered the last word Vinicius lost consciousness.

When he recovered Lygia was tendering him a refreshing drink. He held her hand for an instant, and asked her:

"Have you too pardoned me?"

"We are Christians, and therefore forbidden to cherish rancour in our hearts."

"Lygia," continued Vinicius, "whosoever your god may be, I intend to offer him a hundred bullocks as a sacrifice, simply because he is your god."

She replied:

"You will be best honouring Him in your heart when you have learnt to love Him."

"Simply because he is your god," repeated Vinicius brokenly as he closed his eyes under the influence of a new attack of faintness.

Lygia left the room, but soon returned, and approached his bedside to see if he were asleep. Feeling her near him, he opened his eyes and smiled; whereupon she gently pressed her hand to his eyelids, as though urging him to slumber. Instantly he seemed to become wrapped about with a great tenderness, and at the same time to be growing fainter, for night had fallen, and brought with it an access of fever. He could not sleep; he could only follow Lygia's comings and goings. Now and then he would fall into a doze which permitted him to hear and to see all that was passing around him, but in which reality kept mingling with the visions that were induced by the fever.

It seemed to him that in the middle of an old abandoned cemetery there stood a temple in the form of a tower, and that of that temple Lygia was priestess. Never did he lose sight of her, for she was standing on the tower's summit, with a lute in her hand, and her form in brilliant light, like the Eastern priestesses whom he had heard sing hymns by night to the moon. He himself was painfully climbing the winding staircase of the tower, with the aim of carrying her off, while behind him crept Chilo—his teeth chattering with terror, and his lips ever repeating, "Do not act thus, my lord, for she is a priestess, and He will avenge her." Who the "He" was Vinicius did not know, but he had a feeling that he, Vinicius, was about to commit a sacrilege,

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and the thought terrified him. Arrived at the balustrade which surrounded the summit of the tower, he suddenly perceived that Lygia was standing by the side of the Apostle with his silver beard. Then the Apostle said to him, "Raise not your hand against her, for she belongs to me"; and, with the words, he lifted Lygia on to the rays of the moon, as on to a road leading to heaven, while Vinicius stretched out his arms in entreaty that she would let him come too.

He awoke, and found himself gazing in front of him. On its tall tripod the dying lamp was still sending forth some faint rays of light, while before the fire there were seated the whole company of Christians, engaged in warming themselves, for the keenness of the outer night had chilled the room. Indeed, so cold was it that Vinicius could see the breath as it fell from their lips. In the middle of the group was the Apostle, and at his feet, on a low footstool, Lygia; while further off were Glaucus, Crispus, and Miriam, and, at the extremities of the group, Ursus on the one side and Nazarus (Miriam's son) on the other—the latter a dark-haired boy of charming mien and figure.

Lygia was listening with parted lips to the Apostle, and every head was turned in his direction. As he discoursed in a low voice Vinicius set himself, with a sort of superstitious awe that almost equalled that which he had experienced in his dream, to take stock of the venerable speaker. Somehow he felt that during his delirium he had beheld the truth, and that this aged stranger who had come from distant shores would really deprive him of Lygia, and bear her away by an unknown road. He was the more convinced that it was of *her* the Apostle was speaking, that it was with the object of removing *her* that the old man was devising ways and means, in that he, Vinicius, could not imagine any one to be speaking of anything else. Summoning to his aid all the presence of mind of which he was capable, he listened to what Peter was saying.

Presently he heard the Apostle pronounce the name of Christ.

"These people seem simply to live by that name," thought Vinicius.

Next the old man went on to tell of the Master's arrest.

"A troop of soldiers," said he, "came with some servants of the priests to seize Him; and when the Saviour asked of them, 'Whom seek ye?' they replied, 'Jesus of Nazareth.' Yet no sooner had He replied, 'I am he,' than the soldiers and servants fell to earth before Him, and dared not lay hands upon the Lord. Only when they had asked the question a second time did they seize Him."

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Here the Apostle broke off to stretch his hands towards the flames. Then he continued:

"The night was cold as it is to-night, but my heart was burning within me. Yes, I drew my sword to defend Him, and cut off the ear of a servant of the High Priest. I would have defended Him even as I would have defended my own life, had not He said to me, 'Put up thy sword into its sheath. Must I not drink the cup which my Father hath presented unto me?' Then they seized Him afresh, and bound Him."

Having thus spoken, the Apostle clasped his hands to his forehead, and remained silent for a while—evidently with the intention of marshalling his recollections before proceeding further with his story.

But Ursus cried indignantly:

"No matter *what* might have happened, I would have—"

He broke off abruptly, for Lygia had laid her finger upon his lips. Only the giant's breathing was to be heard—a breathing which betokened the tempest that was raging in his soul as he reflected that, though always ready to kiss the Apostle's feet, he could not wholly approve of all that the Apostle had done. Had any one raised a hand against the Saviour in *his*, Ursus', presence, and *he* had been with Him that night—well, all the soldiers, the servants, the priests, and the slaves in the world should have been annihilated! The tears gushed from Ursus' eyes. For him it was not only a matter for regret, but also a case of conscience, seeing that, in thus acting, he would nevertheless have disobeyed the Saviour, and hindered the redemption of the world.

Presently Peter resumed his narrative; but the fever had again plunged Vinicius into a semi-conscious state in which what he had just heard became mingled with what he had heard the previous night at Ostrianum concerning the day when Christ had shown Himself on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

This time Vinicius could see an immense sheet of water, on which was a fishing-boat, with, in the boat, Peter and Lygia. He himself was swimming with all his might in their wake, but the pain in his broken arm kept preventing him from catching them up. A storm was driving the billows into his eyes, and at length, feeling himself on the point of sinking, he called aloud for help. Then Lygia cast herself upon her knees before the Apostle, who straightway put the boat about, and held out to Vinicius an oar. And Vinicius caught hold of the oar, and, with the help of the people who were in the boat, raised himself over the bulwarks, and fell senseless upon the deck.

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Then it seemed to him that he rose to his feet, and saw a crowd of people swimming through the water behind the boat. The waves kept covering their heads with foam, and of some of them he could see only the hands. But Peter saved all these swimmers, and collected them together in the boat, which kept growing larger and larger, as though by a miracle; until in time it had become filled with a multitude as numerous as that which had assembled at Ostrianum—and, finally, even more numerous. Then Vinicius asked himself in astonishment how every one had contrived to find a place in the boat, which he feared would founder; but Lygia reassured him by showing him a light on a distant shore for which they were making.

Then Vinicius' dream mingled once more with what he had heard the Apostle relate at Ostrianum concerning the appearance of the Saviour on the shore of the Lake. And in the light on the shore he saw standing a Form towards which Peter kept steering the boat; and in proportion as they drew nearer to the Form did the air grow gentler, the sea calmer, and the light more brilliant. Then the crowd of people in the boat began very slowly to sing a hymn, the atmosphere seemed to have become suffused with the smell of spikenard, and in the depths of the water there gleamed forth, iris-like, the reflections of lilies and roses. . . . At length the sides of the boat grounded gently upon the sand; and, taking Vinicius by the hand, and saying to him "Come; for I will lead you thither," Lygia drew him into the radiance of the light.

When Vinicius awoke he could not, at first, recover his sense of reality. Still he seemed to be beside that Lake and surrounded by that multitude. Without knowing why, he set himself to look for Petronius, and was astonished to discover that he could not find him. Finally the brilliant glow from the hearth (beside which no one now was sitting) brought the dreamer back to consciousness. Some olive boughs were burning slowly under a coating of red ashes, but a few splinters of pine which had evidently just been added to the fire were crackling and spurting out flames which enabled him to perceive Lygia seated close by his bedside.

As he did so he felt moved to the bottom of his soul. She had passed the preceding night at Ostrianum; yet all that day she had occupied in attending to his wants, and now, while others were resting, was again watching over him in solitude! Seated motionless on her chair, she had closed her eyes, and Vinicius did not know whether she were sleeping or merely buried in her thoughts. He gazed

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at her profile, at her lowered eyelids, and at the hands which lay upon her knees; and in the brain of the pagan there began to undergo incubation a new idea. Surely, he thought, there exists in the world not only Greek and Roman beauty—the beauty that is sure of itself, and prides itself upon its triumphant nudity—but also a beauty that is absolutely chaste, and contains an informing spirit that is as new as the beauty which has given it birth?

Though he could not make up his mind to call Lygia a Christian, he no longer separated her from the doctrine which she confessed. She alone—she whom he had so offended—was watching over him while her companions slept! It must be because her doctrine had commanded her to do so: and the conviction of this fact, though it filled him with admiration for the teaching of Christ, also gave him pain. He would have preferred that Lygia had acted thus out of love for himself, for his figure, for his eyes, for his statuesque limbs—in short, out of the motives which had led so many Greek and Roman women to clasp their brilliant arms about his neck.

Suddenly he realised that, if *she* had been as those other women, he would have found her less perfect.

She opened her eyes, and, noting that Vinicius was regarding her, approached him, and said:

“I am near you.”

And he replied:

“To-night I have seen your soul in a dream.”

IV

NEXT morning he awoke still feeble, but free from fever. At first he seemed to hear persons talking; but as soon as ever he opened his eyes he perceived that Lygia was no longer present. Only Ursus was turning over the grey embers, in search of a glowing cinder. Presently he gave the coals a poke, and at the same time blew upon them with a blast like that of a bellows-forge. Vinicius remembered that, the previous day, this man had crushed Croto to death; wherefore he fell to scanning, as any habitué of the arena might do, that cyclopean torso and those monumental thighs.

“Thanks to Mercury, it was not *my* neck he twisted!” thought the patrician. “By Pollux, if his fellow Lygians at all resemble him, they will give our legions on the Danube some trouble!”

Then he called aloud:

“Ho there, slave!”

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Ursus withdrew his head from the fireplace, and said with almost an amicable smile:

"My lord, may God give you good day and good health! But I am a free man, not a slave."

Vinicius, who had intended to question him on the subject of Lygia's country, felt a certain satisfaction at these words, since a conversation with a free man, even of low extraction, would wound his dignity as a Roman patrician less than would a conversation with a slave, whom neither the laws nor the manners of the day recognised as a human being at all.

"Then you are not one of Aulus' household?" he inquired.

"No, my lord. I am in the service of Callina, even as I was formerly in that of her mother. But it is of my own free will that I am so."

Then he dived again into the fireplace, in order to poke the coals, upon which he had thrown some wood. Next he issued thence, and said:

"In our house there are no slaves."

Vinicius took no notice, but inquired:

"Where is Lygia?"

"She has just gone out. I am going to cook your breakfast in her stead. She has been watching all night."

"Why did you not take her place?"

"Because she wished it to be so, and I was bound to obey."

The barbarian's eyes grew darker as he added after a pause:

"Had I not obeyed her, you would not now have been alive."

"Are you sorry that you did not kill me?"

"No, my lord; for Christ has commanded us not to kill."

"But what of Atacinus and Croto?"

"I could not help myself," murmured Ursus as he glanced with comical despair at his hands; which, for all that his soul had received baptism, still remained visibly pagan. Next, he placed a saucepan near the fire, and, crouching over the hearth, fixed his pensive eyes upon the flames.

"It was your own fault, my lord," he said at length. "Why did you lay your hands upon her—upon her, the daughter of a king?"

At first Vinicius frowned on hearing a rustic, a barbarian, address him in such a familiar tone, and even venture to chide him. To think that to the amazing things which had befallen him since the day before yesterday *this* should have been added! However, his desire to learn a few details

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about Lygia's life was stronger than his resentment, and he set himself to question the giant concerning the war which the Lygians had waged with Vannius and the Suevi. Ursus required no urging to make him talk, but could not add much to what Aulus Plautius had already told Vinicius. Yet the latter gladly listened to him, since it flattered his immense conceit to hear an eye-witness testify to Lygia's royal origin. As a king's daughter, she might come to occupy as high a place at Cæsar's Court as did the descendants of the premier families in the Empire; and the more so because the Lygians had never been at war with Rome, and, although barbarians, were a redoubtable race, since they numbered, according to Atelius Hister, "a countless host" of warriors—a testimony confirmed by the following words of Ursus:

"We live in the forests, but our country is so spacious that no one knows the exact limits of it, nor the number of its people. In the midst of these forests there have risen towns built of wood, and in these towns is there great wealth, since, in addition to our own booty, we take from the Semnones, the Marcomani, the Vandals, and the Quadi the booty which those tribes have gained. Upon our territory these tribes dare not venture: only, when the wind is blowing from their direction to ours, they sometimes set fire to our forests. Yet we fear them not at all, nor the Roman Cæsar himself."

"But the gods have given the Romans lordship over the whole world," said Vinicius sternly.

"Nay; the gods are but evil spirits," retorted Ursus; "and wheresoever there are no Romans, there is no Roman overlordship."

With that he poked the fire, and then continued, as though speaking to himself:

"When Cæsar caused Callina to be removed to his palace I was for going into the depths of the forests, and summoning thence the Lygians to the assistance of their king's daughter: and in that case the Lygians would have marched upon the Danube, seeing that they are a noble, though pagan, race, and I should have gone to greet them there, and to bring them the glad tidings of the Faith. But that will yet come—some day. When Callina has been restored to Pomponia's household I shall salute her, and beg of her leave to go and convert my people; for Christ was born far, far from them, and they have never so much as heard of Him. True, He knew better than I do where it was meet for Him to be born; but, had He come into the world in *our* country, amid our forests, we should not have martyred Him, but have reared the Child, and seen to it

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that always He had abundance of game and truffles and beaver-skins and amber. Yes, all that we had pillaged of the Suevi and the Marcomani should we have given to *Him*, in order that He might live for ever in wealth and prosperity."

He placed upon the fire the saucepan of broth that was destined for Vinicius, and said no more. Evidently his thoughts were away in the Lygian forests. Meanwhile the broth went on boiling steadily; and when it had been turned out of the saucepan into a bowl, and become sufficiently cool, Ursus resumed:

"Glaucus has said that you are to move as little as possible—that you are to avoid disturbing even your sound arm; wherefore, by Callina's orders, I am to feed you."

Seating himself at the bedside, he set to work to ladle some of the broth out of the bowl with a little goblet, and to put it to the injured man's lips. This he did with such anxious care, while in his blue eyes there played such a good-humoured smile, that Vinicius could scarcely believe that before him he saw the terrible personage of yesterday.

Indeed, for the first time in his life the young patrician found himself wondering what the mind of a rustic, of a serving-man, of a barbarian might contain. Ursus was as clumsy a nurse as he was a willing one. The little goblet kept disappearing between his huge fingers until practically no place remained on its brim for Vinicius to apply his lips to. At length, after several fruitless attempts, the giant said in great embarrassment:

"I should find it a good deal easier to drag an auroch from its lair."

More than once, in circus displays, Vinicius had seen the terrible "*uri*" which were brought from the forests of the North—beasts which even the most valiant of hunters pursued in fear and trembling—monsters which yielded only to elephants in bulk and strength.

"Would you actually dare to seize such brutes by the horns?" he inquired in dumfounded amazement.

"Not until twenty winters had passed over my head did I dare to do so," replied Ursus. "But since that time I have often performed the feat."

Again he offered Vinicius the broth, though even more clumsily than before.

"I must go and fetch Miriam or Nazarus," he said.

As he spoke a pale face came from behind a curtain.

"I will help you," Lygia said; and in a moment she had issued from her cubiculum, where evidently she had just been getting ready for sleep, since her hair was let down, and her only clothing consisted of a *capitum*. Vinicius,

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whose heart began to beat more rapidly the instant that he caught sight of her, reproached her for not having gone to rest; but she replied gaily:

"Yes, I *am* going to take some sleep, but first I must help Ursus."

Taking the goblet into her own hands, she seated herself by the bedside, and began to feed the equally confused and delighted Vinicius. As she bent over him he could feel the warmth of her body and the soft touch of her billowing locks upon his breast. Pale with emotion though he was, and tortured with an access of passion, he yet understood that no other head in the world could be as dear to him as was this one, and that in all the world there was, for him, no other person than Lygia.

Hitherto he had *coveted* her only: now he loved her with his whole heart. Hitherto, in his manner of life, and in his sentiments, he had shown himself a blind and unscrupulous egoist: now he thought of her as much as he did even of himself.

Soon he had eaten all that he could then swallow; and though it would have been the height of joy to look at her, and to feel her near him, he said:

"Enough now. Pray go and take some rest, my divinity."

"Do not call me that," she replied. "It is not befitting that I should hear you speak to me in such terms."

Yet the next moment she was smiling at him, and saying that sleep had deserted her, that she was no longer tired, and that she would go to rest only when Glaucus had arrived. In the young man's ears her words sounded like music, while his heart was full of an ever-growing flood of gratitude and devotion, and his brain kept racking itself to devise means whereby he could show the extent of his thankfulness.

"Lygia," he said after a brief silence, "formerly I did not know you aright; but now I recognise that I took an evil road to reach your heart. I say to you, therefore: return to Pomponia Græcina, and rest assured that, in future, no one shall lay a finger upon you."

Lygia's face suddenly saddened.

"I should be delighted to see Pomponia," she said, "if only from a distance; but never could I return to her house."

"Why not?" asked Vinicius in astonishment.

"Because, through Acte, we Christians hear all that takes place at the Palatine. Have you not heard that, shortly after my flight, and before his departure for Neapolis, Cæsar sent for Aulus and Pomponia, and threatened

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them with his wrath, in the belief that they had helped me to escape? Fortunately Aulus was able to reply: 'You know, my lord, that never a lie has issued from my lips. I swear to you that we have not helped Lygia to escape, nor do we know any more than you do what has become of her.' And Cæsar believed him, and forgot the matter. But our elders have advised me never even to write to her, in order that she may always be in a position to swear that she knows nothing whatever about me (for we are forbidden to lie, even though our life be in jeopardy). Only by side-winds has Pomponia learnt that I am alive and safe."

At the memory of Pomponia tears came into Lygia's eyes; but soon she recovered herself, and continued:

"I know well that Pomponia misses me sadly, but to us there are given consolations which are not vouchsafed to all mankind."

"Yes," replied Vinicius, "I know that your consolations lie in Christ, but nevertheless I do not understand them."

"For us separations do not exist, nor pain and suffering; or, if they do come, they soon become changed into joy. Even death itself, which, for you, means the end of life, means, for us Christians, only its beginning. It represents a change from a troubled, sorry happiness to a happiness which is boundless, untroubled, and eternal."

"And are you yourself happy?"

"Yes," replied Lygia. "Confessing Christ as I do, I could never be unhappy."

Vinicius looked at her as though what she had just said passed the bounds of human understanding.

"And you would never return to Pomponia?" he continued.

"Yes, with my whole heart would I do so; and return I shall some day if God should thus ordain."

"Then once more I say to you: return to her, and by my household gods I swear that never again will I lift a hand against you."

"No; for if I were to do that, I should be exposing my friends to danger. Cæsar has no love for the Plautius family, and my return would soon be noised abroad, and come to Cæsar's ears through the reports of his slaves. Then he would take harsh measures against the Auluses, and at least wrest me from them again."

"Yes," said Vinicius with a frown; "that certainly *might* happen. Cæsar would do it, if only to show that his will must always be fulfilled. Also, it is true that, if he has forgotten you or wishes to think no more of you, it is only because he adjudges the affront to have been shown to

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myself alone, not to him. But, perhaps, after recovering you from the Auluses, he—he might send you to me; and then I could once more restore you to Pomponia."

Sadly she asked him:

"Vinicius, would you like to see me taken back to the palace?"

"No," he replied, grinding his teeth. "I recognise that you are right, and that I have spoken like a fool."

A pause followed; after which he resumed:

"Do you know, you are happier than I am. Amid all your poverty, and despite this curious dwelling that is tenanted only by rustics, you still have your doctrine and your Christ left; whereas I—I have only you in all the world. Ever since you failed me I have been a poor wretch that lacked bread and shelter. You are dearer to me than the whole universe; I have sought you because it is impossible for me to live without you. Except for the hope of finding you again, I should, ere now, have thrown myself upon my sword. But I fear death for the reason that, dead, I could no longer see you. Do you remember our talks in Aulus' house? Once you drew on the sand the figure of a fish, and I could not then think what it signified. Also, do you remember our game at ball, and how Aulus interrupted us with a threat about Libitina, and put an end to our conversation? And do you remember how, at parting, Pomponia said to Petronius that there existed only one god—a god who was omnipotent and all-merciful? Ah, at the time we never thought that he was also *your* god, the Christ. Let Him now give you to me, and I will love Him for ever and ever, even though He seems to me to be the god only of slaves and foreigners and outcasts. As you sit by my side I can see that all your thoughts are of Him. But think also of me, or I shall end by simply hating Him. For me you are the only deity in the world. Yes, I could clasp your feet, and say prayers to you, and offer you adoration and sacrifices and genuflections, O thrice holy one! You do not know, you never can know, how much I love you!"

To Lygia these words sounded as so many blasphemies. Yet she could not help pitying Vinicius for his sufferings. She felt that he had for her a boundless love and adoration; she understood that this hard, dangerous man was as wholly her property as any slave could be; and, seeing him thus humbled, she rejoiced in the power which she could wield over him. For a moment she lived again in the past; for a moment she beheld once more the splendid Vinicius, handsome as a pagan deity, who had spoken to her of love in the Aulus mansion, and had awakened her half-childlike

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heart as from a deep slumber. For a moment she beheld once more the Vinicius whose kisses she could still feel upon her lips, and from whose arms Ursus had snatched her in the palace. And to-day, with his aquiline face expressive of pain and of rapture, with his pale forehead and imploring eyes, with his look of wounded, agonised love so full of mingled adoration and humility, he was just as she would have had him be—he was the man whom she could well love with her whole soul. And he was dearer to her than ever!

Then suddenly she perceived that the moment might come when her love for this man would envelop her like a hurricane, and carry her off her feet. Was it, then, for *this* that she had sought safety in flight, that she had so long remained hidden in the most wretched quarters of the city? What sort of a man, after all, was Vinicius? An Augustan, a soldier, and one of Nero's courtiers. True, he was changed; yet had he not just said that, if she thought more of Christ than she did of him, he was ready to detest the Saviour? And in Lygia's opinion the mere thought of any other love than love for Christ was a sin both against Him and against His doctrine. She felt seized with fear as she contemplated her own future and heart.

While this inward struggle was in progress Glaucus arrived to dress the patient's wounds, and to examine his condition. Instantly anger showed itself again in Vinicius' features, for he felt furious that his conversation with Lygia should have been interrupted. Indeed, he could scarcely reply patiently to the questions put to him by Glaucus; and though it is true that he soon corrected his attitude, any belief that Lygia might have cherished as to his indomitable nature having benefited by the sermon at Ostrianum was destined to prove an illusion. It was only for *her* sake that he had changed. Apart from that sentiment, there still beat in the young man's breast the old egotistical, hard, distinctively Roman heart.

Hitherto, in her prayers, Lygia had been able to offer to Christ a conscience serene and undefiled as a tear; but now that serenity had become impaired. Into the chalice of the flower there had crept a venomous insect, and begun to hum there. Even sleep, for all her two nights of watching, brought her no relief. She dreamed that at Ostrianum the Emperor Nero, heading a band of Augustans, bacchantes, dancers, and gladiators, was crushing under his rose-garlanded chariot a multitude of Christians, and that Vinicius seized her in his arms, drew her into his chariot, and murmured, as he clasped her to his breast: "Come with us!"

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V

FROM that time onwards she rarely appeared in the common living-room, and scarcely ever approached the patient. Yet she could not recover her peace of mind, more especially when she perceived that Vinicius' eyes followed her everywhere with a look of entreaty, that he greeted her every word as though it were a boon, that he suffered without daring to complain (lest he should disgust her), and that she alone could bring him comfort and recovery. At such times her heart overflowed with pity; nor could she any longer conceal from herself the fact that the more she sought to avoid him, the more she pitied him, and that her doing so was gradually arousing in her breast sentiments of an increasingly tender nature. Her self-possession deserted her, and more than once she had to remind herself that it was her duty to remain near him—firstly, because the divine doctrine had commanded to return good for evil, and, secondly, because, by conversing with him, she might be able to attract him towards that doctrine. Yet on the instant her conscience would reply that she was seeking her own pleasure, and that it was only earthly love that was leading her on.

Occasionally, also, she would feel as though caught in a net whereof the meshes contracted in proportion as she sought to break through them. Whenever she approached Vinicius, and saw him brighten at the sight of her, her heart overflowed with joy; and one day, when she happened to perceive traces of tears on his eyelashes, the idea entered her head that it might be in her power to dry them with kisses. Full of contempt for herself, she spent the following night in weeping.

By this time Vinicius had come to show considerably less temper in his conversations with Glaucus; for more than once the thought had occurred to him that this poor doctor-slave, old Miriam, and Crispus were human beings like himself. Indeed, he ended by liking even Ursus.

Of Nazarus alone did he not approve, for the reason that he conceived the boy to have had the audacity to fall in love with Lygia. For a long time he fought against his desire to evince his aversion to the youth; but once, when Nazarus brought Lygia a present of a couple of quails which he had bought with his hardly earned money, the blood of the Quirites re-awoke in Vinicius, and reminded him that a foreign vagabond was worth less than the meanest of

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earthworms. Hearing Lygia's expressions of thanks, the patrician turned pale, and said as Nazarus left the room to get some water for the birds:

"Lygia, how can you suffer that fellow to offer you presents? Do you not know that the Greeks call the people of his race 'those dogs of Jews'?"

"I know not what the Greeks call them," she replied; "but I *do* know that Nazarus is a Christian and my brother."

With that she threw Vinicius a look of sadness and astonishment; for in that dwelling she was not accustomed to witness such outbreaks of violence. As for him, he clenched his teeth to avoid crying out that he would like to bludgeon such a brother to death, or to send him, in chains, to work on the land in one of his Sicilian vineyards. But he restrained himself, swallowed his anger, and said:

"Pardon me, Lygia. In my eyes you are a king's daughter, and the adopted child of the Plautius family."

And so well did he keep a rein upon himself that when Nazarus re-entered the room he promised to make him a present of two peacocks or flamingos (of which the gardens of the patrician's villa were full).

The oftener Vinicius gained these victories over himself, the more attached to him did Lygia grow. As a matter of fact, the young tribune could submit his violence to Christian doctrine without any great effort. The real difficulty was to make his mind sympathise with the doctrine itself. Though he could not venture to doubt the supernatural origin of Christ, nor His resurrection, nor the other miracles, he felt that the doctrine was one that would destroy all order, supremacy, and social differences. What then would become of the Roman power and dominion? Could the Romans renounce the Empire of the world, and recognise the host of conquered nations as their equals? No; such a thing was, to a Roman patrician, unthinkable.

What was passing within his mind Lygia clearly saw. She could see both his effort to accept the Christian doctrine and his natural aversion to doing so. This hurt her cruelly. Yet the tacit respect which he showed for Christ always aroused her compassion, her pity, and her gratitude, and drew her more and more towards the young man. She recalled Pomponia Gracina and Aulus, and how the thought that beyond the tomb she would no longer have Aulus by her side had been, for Pomponia, an endless cause of sadness. Lygia could understand that bitterness and that grief. She too had met with a being who was dear to her, and from whom eternal separation was being threatened. Yet sometimes she would flatter herself with the hope that

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Vinicius' soul would eventually accept the Christian verities. Yet such illusions never proved of long duration. Vinicius' a Christian! How could the words become reconciled?

With terror Lygia recognised that the damnation hanging over Vinicius' head provoked in her, not aversion, but a compassion which rendered him even dearer to her than before. One day when she was sitting beside him she said that, apart from the Christian doctrine, life did not exist; whereupon he raised himself upon his sound arm (he had now begun to recover his strength), and laid his head abruptly upon the young girl's knees.

"Life," he said, "is *you*."

The breath choked in Lygia's bosom, all power of reasoning left her, and a sort of quiver of delight shook her from head to foot. With her hands she clasped his temples, and forced him to rise; yet in the effort she so leant against him that her lips touched his hair, and for a moment the two struggled with themselves, and with the love that was urging them into one another's arms. Then Lygia rose and fled.

Vinicius had no doubts as to the price which he would have to pay for this moment of bliss; for Lygia now understood that it was *she* who stood in need of help. The following day she spent in tears, in sleeplessness, and in prayer to the Almighty; feeling the while that she was unworthy to address Him, and that her sin could never be pardoned. Next day she left her cubiculum early, called Crispus into the garden, and in the little arbour, overgrown with ivy and bindweed, opened to him her soul, and besought him to let her quit Miriam's dwelling, since she no longer had confidence in herself, and could make no further stand against her love for Vinicius.

Crispus approved of the plan, but had not a word of pardon for a love which he conceived to be a sin. Indeed, his heart overflowed with indignation at the thought that this Lygia, this fugitive whom he had taken under his protection, and had loved, and had strengthened in the faith, and had until now regarded as a pure lily grown in the soil of the Christian doctrine, should ever have admitted to her bosom a love that was not the love divine. Her deception filled him with bitterness and astonishment.

"Go and ask pardon of God for your faults," he said to her with an air of sorrow. "Yes, save yourself before the evil spirit which has cast its spell upon you shall have brought you to utter ruin, and led you to deny the Saviour. God died upon the Cross to redeem your soul with His blood; yet *you* have preferred the son of darkness who once sought to make you his concubine. And who is

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he, this man? The friend and servant of Anti-Christ—the companion of Anti-Christ in his debaucheries and crimes. Whither will he lead you if not into the abyss, the Sodom where he lives—the city which God is about to destroy with the fires of His wrath? Would to Heaven that you were dead! Would to Heaven that the walls of this house had fallen upon you rather than that this serpent should have entered your bosom, and there vomited the venom of his iniquity!”

Lygia had hoped that the old priest who, since her flight from the Palatine, had stood to her as a father would have shown her at least *some* compassion, and consoled her, and given her renewed strength and courage; but his resentment increased as he went on.

“To God,” he continued, “I offer my pain and my disappointment. You have deceived the Saviour Himself, for you have descended into a sewer of which the emanations have poisoned your soul. You might have offered that soul to Christ as a precious casket, and said to Him, ‘Lord, fill it with Thy grace’: yet you have preferred to offer it only to the servant of the Evil One. May God pardon you, and have mercy upon you; for, until you have cast out this serpent, I, who looked upon you as one of the elect, will—”

He stopped abruptly on perceiving that they were no longer alone. Through the dried bindweed and evergreen ivy he had caught sight of two men, one of whom was the Apostle Peter. The second man he could not at first recognise, since his face was partly shrouded with a cloak; and for a moment Crispus believed him to be the Greek.

While Crispus had been declaiming these men had entered the arbour and seated themselves upon a bench. The moment that the Apostle’s companion revealed his ascetic face and bald crown, Crispus recognised in that uncomely, but inspired, head, with its red eyebrows and its crooked nose, no less a personage than Paul of Tarsus.

Lygia threw herself upon her knees, and hid her small, tear-stained countenance in the folds of the Apostle’s robe. But she did not speak.

Peter said, “Peace be with you all,” and laid his wrinkled hands upon Lygia’s head. Then, raising his eyes to the old priest, he continued:

“Crispus, have you not heard me say that, at the marriage-feast of Cana, Christ blessed the love of a husband and a wife? Think you that Christ, who suffered Mary Magdalene to fall at His feet and to be pardoned for her sins, would turn away His face from this child, who is as pure as the lilies of the field? But, for you, Lygia—so long as the eyes of him whom you cherish in your heart

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open not to the light of truth, do you avoid him, lest he lead you into sin. At the same time, pray for him, and rest assured that your love is not blameworthy. So long as you seek to flee temptation, so long will that be accounted unto you for righteousness. Weep not, repine not, for I say unto you that the Saviour's loving-kindness has not left you, and that your prayers will be heard, and that after these days of affliction there will come days of rejoicing."

Then again he laid his hands upon Lygia's head, and gave her his blessing, while his face shone with the happiness of Heaven.

"Yes, I have sinned against the pity of the Lord," said Crispus. "But I thought that, in suffering an earthly affection to enter her heart, she had denied Christ."

To this Peter replied:

"I denied Him thrice, yet did He pardon me, and suffer me to become the shepherd of His flock."

"Moreover," pursued Crispus, "Vinicius is an Augustan and—"

"Christ can soften even the hardest of hearts," was Peter's rejoinder.

Lastly, Paul of Tarsus, who, until now, had kept silence, added:

"I am he who persecuted the servants of Christ, and handed them over unto death. I am he who, when Stephen was being stoned, kept the clothes of his executioners. Formerly I sought to sweep the Truth from the face of the earth, but the Saviour has foreordained that I should preach it throughout all the world. Already I have proclaimed it in Judæa, in Greece, in the Isles, and in this wicked city during the time when I sojourned here a prisoner. And now that Peter, my overseer, has called me to be near him, I have come again to cast the good seed upon this stony ground, which the Lord purposes to make fruitful until it has brought forth a bounteous harvest."

With this he rose; and for a moment the little man with the bent back appeared to Crispus what he really was—namely, a giant who would one day shake the world to its foundations, and become master of lands and of nations.

VI

PETRONIUS to VINICIUS:—

"I pray you, dear friend, not to imitate, in your letters, either the Lacedæmonians or Julius Cæsar. If, like the latter, you could have written, 'Veni, vidi, vici,' I should

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have understood your conciseness; but, as it is, your letter merely means, 'Veni, vidi, fugi'; and, in view of the extraordinary occurrences which have befallen you, that would seem to require further explanation. Indeed, I could hardly believe my eyes when I read that the Lygian had strangled Croto as easily as a Caledonian hound strangles a wolf in the fastnesses of Hibernia. The fellow is worth his weight in gold, and it lies in his own hands to become a prime favourite with Cæsar. On my return to Rome I must cultivate a closer acquaintance with him, and have him cast in bronze. Ahenobarbus will be dying with curiosity when I tell him that it is a statue modelled from nature.

"Noble bodies of athletes are growing rarer and rarer every day, both in Italy and in Greece. Of the Orient it is useless to speak; while, as regards the Germans, their muscles are lost in rolls of fat, and they comprise bulk rather than strength. Try and find out if this Lygian is an exception, or whether in his country there are other men of the same sort: for if you or myself were to receive a commission to organise games, it would be well to know where to seek the best athletes.

"But you, I hear, escaped his heavy hands. Thanks be to the gods of the Orient and of the Occident for that! The fact that you are a patrician and a man of consular rank was probably what saved you. These adventures of which you have been the hero fill me with utter stupefaction—both the cemetery where you found yourself among the Christians, the Christians themselves, their conduct with regard to you, Lygia's renewed flight, and, lastly, the melancholy and restlessness which breathe in every line of your short letter. Give me some explanation of this, for there is a multitude of things which I do not understand. Indeed, I am but speaking the truth when I say that I cannot make head or tail of the Christians, of yourself, or of Lygia. Do not be surprised that I who take so little interest in anything beyond myself should question you with such curiosity. The reason for this is that I had a hand in bringing these events about, as well as am, to a certain extent, touched by them. Write as soon as ever you can, since I cannot exactly say when we are likely to see one another again. Plan succeeds to plan in Ahenobarbus' head, even as one wind follows another in spring. At present he is staying at Beneventum; whence he intends to depart for Greece without first revisiting Rome. Tigellinus, however, has been advising him to return—at all events for a while, lest the people, in despair at his absence (or, rather, at that of the games and food), should rebel.

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What the eventual decision will be I know not. If Achæa is given the go-by, then we may take it into our heads to visit Egypt. I should insist upon your coming to join us (for I think that, in your present state of mind, travel and the diversions that we have to offer would act as an antidote), were it not that you would no longer find us here. Accordingly you would do better to go and recuperate on your Sicilian estates, and not remain in Rome. Tell me all about yourself in your next letter. I send you no wish except that you may recover your health: for by Pollux I know not *what* to wish you."

This epistle Vinicius felt no desire to answer. To do so would serve no good purpose, would clear up nothing, and would lead to no decision. In any case Petronius could not understand. Something had come about which had separated the friends.

The young tribune was still in a weak state when he left the Trans-Tiberian quarter for his splendid villa near the Carinæ; and at first he experienced a sort of pleasure in finding himself once more lapped in well-being and luxury. Yet even as he felt so he was also conscious that everything which had hitherto constituted his interest in life either no longer existed for him or had sunk to insignificant proportions. Also, he had a feeling that what had hitherto bound his soul to life had undergone a severance, and that nothing had been woven to take its place. The very idea of going to Beneventum, and thence to Achæa, and laboriously heaping folly upon extravagance, was distasteful to him. "Why should I do this?" he thought. "What have I to gain by it?" For the first time in his life he conceived Petronius' conversation and spirit and liveliness and precious ideas and careful diction to be things which could never give him aught but a doubtful joy.

On the other hand, solitude began to weigh upon him. All his friends were at Beneventum with Cæsar, and at times he would think that, had he but had some one to whom to communicate a few of the thoughts of which he was so full, he could have envisaged those thoughts better, and co-ordinated and comprehended them. So at length he decided to answer Petronius' letter. Without actually intending to send the draft, he sketched it in the following terms:

"Since you wish me to write at greater length, I am willing to do so. But shall I succeed in making myself any the clearer? I know nothing—I feel surrounded with enigmas. I have told you of my sojourn among the Christians, of their manner of treating their enemies (among whom they

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had the right to count both myself and Chilo), of the kindness with which I have been tended, and of Lygia's disappearance. No, my friend; it is not because I am the son of a personage of consular rank that the Christians spared me. For them such considerations do not exist. Moreover, they pardoned Chilo equally with myself, although it was I who urged them to kill him, and then bury him in the garden.

"I will add that, had I been ill in my own house, and amid my own people and my own family, I should certainly have had more comfort, but not such devoted care. Had Lygia been my sister or my wife, she could not have tended me more solicitously than she did. More than once it occurred to me that only love could have inspired such anxious attention; more than once I seemed to read that love in her face and her eyes. And when I did so, would you believe it, but, amid those simple people, and in that miserable chamber that was half kitchen and half triclinium, I felt inexpressibly happy! No, I was not indifferent to Lygia. Yet without my knowledge this same Lygia has left the widow Miriam's dwelling, and I spend whole days with my head in my hands as I ask myself, over and over again, why she has acted thus. Have I told you that I proposed to her to return to the Auluses? But that is no longer feasible, since the Auluses have left for Sicily; nor would it have been prudent to do so, seeing that the gossip of slaves circulates from house to house, and would in time have conveyed the news even to the Palatine, and thus led Cæsar to seize her again. However, before she departed I made her understand that I intend to persecute her no more, that I have done with violence, and that, powerless either to relinquish my love or to live without her, I shall find happiness only in taking her to be my wife. Yet she has fled from me! Why is that? She had no further danger to fear, and if she did not love me, she could have rejected me.

"The previous day I made the acquaintance of a strange man named Paul of Tarsus, who spoke with me concerning Christ and his doctrine. So powerful were this man's words that each of them seemed to shake the world as he uttered them. And after Lygia's flight this same Paul paid me another visit. 'When God shall have opened your eyes to the light,' he said to me, 'and when He has caused the scales to drop from your eyes, even as He caused them to drop from my own, *then* you will feel that Lygia has acted reasonably—then, perhaps, you will find her again.' These words sounded in my ears as though I were hearing them from the mouth of the python at Delphi. Yet at times I

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seem to divine something of their significance. While loving all mankind, the Christians are foes to our manner of living, to our gods, and to our—crimes. That is why Lygia has fled from me.

"Perhaps you will say that, since she could have rejected me, she had no need to flee. But what if the truth were that she returns my affection? In that case she has fled from love itself. At the very thought I feel as though I could send slaves to call at the door of every house, 'Lygia, return!' Moreover, I should never have forbidden her to believe in her Christ; to whom, as a matter of fact, I would have raised an altar in the atrium. How would one god the more have mattered to me? Why should I not have believed in him—I who place so little faith in the old gods? I know for certain that the Christians never lie, and they say that their deity rose again from the dead. Now, a mere *man* cannot rise again from the dead.

"This Paul of Tarsus—who is a Roman citizen, but of the Jewish race, and conversant with the ancient Hebrew writings—also told me that the coming of Christ was predicted by prophets more than a thousand years before the event. These are extraordinary matters, but does not the extraordinary surround us everywhere, and have men yet ceased to speak of Apollonius of Tyana? What Paul affirms—namely, that there is not a troupe of gods, but only one deity—seems to me reasonable enough. Seneca, too, appears to be of this opinion, as have been many other thinkers before him. That Christ did exist, that he allowed himself to be crucified for the salvation of the world, and that he rose again from the dead is absolutely certain. I see, therefore, no motive for persisting in a contrary opinion. Why should I not raise an altar to this god when I would do as much for, say, Serapis? Indeed, I should find no difficulty in denying the other gods, seeing that any reasonable mind might decline to believe in them. But it appears that that would not satisfy the Christians. With them it is not enough merely to worship Christ: one needs also to practise his doctrine. Here one finds oneself on the shores of a sea which one is commanded to pass on foot. Even if I were to promise to practise the Christian doctrine, the Christians would know that the promise was vain. Paul made no pretence to me on that point.

"You know how much I love Lygia, and that there is nothing that I would not do for her. Yet, even were she to exact it of me, I could not raise Soracte or Vesuvius on my shoulders, nor hold the Lake of Thrasymene in the palm of my hand, nor change my black eyes into blue ones like her own.

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"Nor am I a philosopher. Yet also I am not as great a fool as sometimes I must have seemed to you to be. Let me say this to you—that, though I do not know how the Christians order their lives, I *do* know that where their doctrine begins there come to an end the Roman supremacy, life, the difference between victor and vanquished, the gulf between rich and poor, the system of masters and slaves, government, Rome, Cæsar, right, and the whole order of the world—their places being taken only by the Christ, and by a compassion which is unknown to us, and by a loving-kindness which is contrary to all man's instincts in general and to our Roman instincts in particular. I declare that Lygia interests me more than does all Rome or the Roman dominion. The world might crumble to dust so long as I had her safe and sound in my house. But that is not the point. For the Christians it is not enough that one should agree with them only in word; and in my nature there is something which revolts from their doctrine. Whenever my mouth would seek to glorify that doctrine, whenever I feel that I should like to make my conduct conform to its teachings, both my reason and my intellect rise up and tell me that I am doing so simply for the sake of Lygia, and that, but for her, nothing in the wide world could be more distasteful to me. Curiously enough, the Paul of Tarsus of whom I have spoken divines this, as also does, for all his rustic exterior and his low origin, the old pontiff Peter—the greatest among the Christians, and a former disciple of Christ. And do you know what they do? They pray for me, and ask that I be given an entity which they call grace! Yet the only thing that I really receive is disquietude. More and more do I pine for Lygia.

"I have told you, have I not, that without my knowledge she has fled from me? Yet, before going away, she left behind her (for myself) a little cross which she had made of boxwood. I found it near my bed when I awoke. It is now in my lararium, and, for some reason which I cannot explain, I never approach it but with awe and respect—as though it had in it something divine. I love the cross for the reason that *her* hands fashioned its arms; and I hate it for the reason that it has separated us. Sometimes, indeed, I fancy that it must hold some spell, and that the archpriest Peter, for all that he gives himself out to be a simple fisherman, must be greater than Apollonius and all who preceded that seer—that, in fact, he has enchanted both Lygia and Pomponia and myself.

"When I left the Christians, and returned to my own house, I found no one awaiting me, for I was believed to have gone to Beneventum. The place was all in disorder,

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and my slaves were drinking at a banquet which they had organised in my triclinium. Death itself could not have come upon them more unexpectedly than I did; nor would it have disturbed them so much. All threw themselves at my knees, and some even fainted with terror. I—well, what do you suppose I did? At first I was for sending for red-hot irons and rods; but almost as instantly a kind of shame seized me, and, would you believe it, also a kind of pity for those wretches! Among them there still remain some old men whom my grandfather, Marcus Vinicius, brought from the banks of the Rhine. So I departed, and shut myself up in my library. There some even stranger ideas came over me—for example, that in future I would not treat my slaves as I had hitherto done, and that they were human beings like myself. For two days my slaves lived in a state of terror, for they thought that I was deferring punishment only in order to arrange it the better. Yet I did not punish them at all, nor have I done so, for the simple reason that I feel that I *cannot*. On the third day I called them all together, and said: ‘I pardon you. Try by diligent service to repair your error.’ And at these words they fell upon their knees and burst into tears—stretching out their arms, and calling me their master and their father. And I, I am ashamed to say, was moved likewise. Just at that moment I seemed to see Lygia’s sweet figure standing beside me, and thanking me with eyes that were full of tears. Yes, my own eyes too, I could feel, were growing dim. . . . As for the slaves, never formerly did terror stimulate them to work as now does gratitude. Not only do they perform their regular service, but they seem to vie with one another as to which of them can best divine my desires. I tell you this simply because one day, when I objected that his doctrine would result in shattering the world like a cask that has become denuded of its hoops, the Apostle Paul replied: ‘Love is a stronger bond than fear.’ And now I see that, under certain circumstances, his maxim may be true.

“The same self-control did I exercise with regard to people who, on hearing of my return, came to pay me their respects. You know that I have never been parsimonious with such folk, but my father used to treat them with a high hand, and I was brought up in his tradition. This time, however, the sight of their ragged mantles and starving faces moved me to a kind of pity, and I gave them something to eat. Nay, more: I even conversed with some of them, addressed them by name, questioned others concerning their wives and children, and saw tears start to their eyes. And as I did so, once more Lygia seemed to

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be looking at me, as though she were rejoicing. . . . Whether it is that my mind is beginning to lose its balance, or whether it is that love is overshadowing my reason, I know not. I only know that I am for ever feeling as though her eyes were fixed upon me from afar, and that I dare do nothing which might sadden or offend her.

"Yes, Caius, a revolution has taken place in my soul. At certain times the fact pleases me, while at other times I find torture in the very idea; for at such times there comes upon me a fear that I must have lost my old courage and energy, and be growing unfitted not only to sit in council or judgment, and to assist at banquets, but also to take part in war. Certainly there must be spells about.

"If Lygia had in any way resembled Nigidia, Poppæa, Crispinilla, and our other divorced women; if she had been as shameless, as pitiless, as debauched as they—well, in that case I should never have loved her as I do. But, inasmuch as I love her because of the very thing that separates her from me, you can see how completely I have lost my bearings.

"I do not intend to leave Rome. In the first place, I could not bear the society of the Augustans; while, in the second place, the only solace of my restlessness and disappointment is the thought that I am near Lygia, and, through Glaucus (who has promised to come and see me) or Paul of Tarsus, may perhaps hear something of her. No, I would not leave Rome even if you were to offer me the governorship of Egypt. Also, I have commissioned a sculptor to make a funeral stone for Gulo, whom I killed in a moment of anger. Too late did I remember that he had often carried me in his arms, and that it was he who first taught me how to bend a bow. Why the memory of him should awake in me now—a memory that is so like regret, so like remorse—I do not know. If what I have written in this letter at all surprises you, I can assure you that I myself am equally astonished. Yet what I have written is the truth."

VII

To the foregoing epistle Vinicius received no answer, for Petronius refrained from sending one, in daily expectation of hearing Cæsar give orders for the court to return to Rome. Already the news that such was Cæsar's plan had spread throughout the city, and aroused great jubilation among a populace that was yearning for its annual games, as well as for distributions of oil and grain from the swell-

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ing stores at Ostium. Already Helius, one of Nero's freedmen, had announced to the Senate that his lord might shortly be expected. Nevertheless Nero — who, with his Court, had embarked at Misenum — did not trouble to hurry himself, but halted at various towns on the coast, either to rest, or to appear at the theatres. At Minturna (for example), where again he sang in public, he remained as long as fifteen days; while he even asked himself whether he should not return to Neapolis to await the entry of spring, which was coming in milder and earlier than usual.

However, Vinicius still remained shut up in his house, where he saw no one except, at intervals, the physician Glaucus. These visits he greatly valued, for then he could talk of Lygia. Glaucus was ignorant as to where she had taken refuge, but assured the patrician that the elders of the faith were keeping careful watch over her.

One day, moved by Vinicius' melancholy, Glaucus told him that the Apostle Peter had blamed Crispus for reproaching Lygia with her earthly love. Upon this Vinicius turned pale with emotion. More than once he had thought that Lygia was not indifferent to him; yet always he had fallen back into a sea of doubt and uncertainty. Now for the first time he heard his hopes and wishes confirmed from the mouth of a stranger—from the mouth of a stranger who was a Christian at that!

Also, it seemed to him that, if Lygia bore him affection, the very fact that she did so removed the last obstacle, seeing that he was ready to pay honour to Christ. Yet, while earnestly begging him to receive baptism, Glaucus did not dare give him an assurance that that would gain him Lygia's hand. Rather, the physician said always that baptism ought to be sought for its own sake, and for the love of Christ, rather than for the accomplishment of an earthly end. "First must one have a Christian soul," he used to add; and Vinicius, whom any obstacle at once roused to resentment, at length began to understand that Glaucus had been speaking only as a Christian was bound to do.

Again, Vinicius often felt a desire to see Paul of Tarsus once more, for the reason that the latter's words had greatly excited the young patrician's interest; but Paul had left for Aricium, and, the visits of Glaucus becoming rarer and rarer, Vinicius ended by finding himself left completely alone. Thereupon he took to scouring the courts and alleys of the Suburran and Trans-Tiberian quarters, in the hope of getting a glimpse of Lygia, if only from a distance; and when this hope failed him he fell a prey to

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weariness and ennui. At length there came a moment when his pristine nature returned upon him with the force of a wave which has drawn back to strike the shore anew. It suddenly struck him that he had been a fool to cumber his brain with things which had brought him sorrow, and that he would do better to extract from life all that it had to give him. Consequently he resolved to forget Lygia—or at all events to return to, and to make use of, pleasure, without giving her a further thought. Yet also he had a feeling that this would be his last dash for liberty—he was conscious of the fact even as, with all his customary ardour, he plunged into the whirlpool of a free and easy life.

Everything seemed to encourage him therein. The city, which, during the winter, had been empty and dead, was now beginning to revive, in the hope of Cæsar's pending arrival, and to prepare for him a solemn reception. Spring also was coming in; the breath of the African winds was melting the snows from the summits of the Alban Hills, and the grass in the gardens was becoming strewn with violets. Daily the forums and the Campus Martius were full of a multitude of people who had come to bask in the waxing sunshine; while along the Appian Way—the usual resort of strollers—there rolled numbers of richly decorated chariots. Already the excursions to the Alban Hills had begun, and young women, on pretext of going to worship Juno at Lavinium or Diana at Aricium, would drive out in search of emotions, of society, of adventures, or of pleasure.

One day, among the luxurious chariots Vinicius caught sight of the splendid quadriga of Chrysothemis, Petronius' mistress, preceded by two Molossian hounds, and surrounded by a mixed entourage of young men and old senators whose duties had retained them in the city. Chrysothemis herself was driving the four Corsican ponies that were attached to the vehicle, and distributing impartially, now smiles, now taps with her gilded whip. On seeing Vinicius, however, she reined in the ponies, invited him to mount beside her, and drove home, where she detained him at a banquet that lasted all night, and caused him to get so drunk that he could not even remember being removed to his own abode. Yet he remembered afterwards that Chrysothemis had asked him about Lygia, that he had taken offence at her doing so, and that in his drunken state he had soused her head with a cup of Falernian wine: and at the recollection of this he could feel his anger rising again. Next day, however, Chrysothemis had forgotten the injury, for she called to take him for a drive on the Appian Way.

She remained to supper at his house, declared that for a long time past she had been tired not only of Petronius,

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but also of her lute-player, and that her heart was free. For eight days, therefore, they appeared in public together; but their relations were not likely to be lasting—the less so since, in spite of the fact that, after the incident of the Falernian wine, Lygia's name was never once mentioned, Vinicius was unable to dismiss her from his thoughts. Always he felt as though her eyes were fixed upon him, and, though he would grow angry with himself, it hurt him to think that he might be causing her sorrow. Consequently at the first exhibition of jealousy which Chrysothemis displayed—it was on the subject of two young Syrian girls whom he had acquired—he told her without ceremony that the connection was at an end.

Yet this in no way changed his mode of life. On the contrary, he even accentuated its excesses, as though to banish the tyrannous memory of Lygia. At the same time, the result of this was to make him realise that the young Christian was the exclusive cause both of his good and of his evil actions, and that, without her, everything was tasteless. To his astonishment as a patrician, as a man who looked upon his every fancy as legitimate, pleasure now repelled him, and brought in its train only remorse. Even Cæsar's return could not awaken him from his inertia, and he only went to call upon Petronius after the latter had sent his litter to fetch him.

Though welcomed with joy by Petronius, Vinicius at first found it distasteful to answer his friend's questions; but at length his feelings and thoughts, so long repressed, found vent in a torrent of words. With even greater wealth of detail than before he recounted the events which had upset him, and lamented the fact that he had become plunged in a state of chaos wherein he had lost not only his peace of mind, but also the gift of distinguishing things and appreciating them at their true value. Nothing attracted him, he said, nor did anything suit his taste. Indeed, he knew not what to do or what to decide upon. He was at once ready to honour Christ and to persecute Him. He was conscious of a sense of the nobility of Christ's doctrine, and of an invincible repulsion to it. Also he was aware that, even should he succeed in getting possession of Lygia, he would never succeed in possessing the *whole* of her, since he would have to share her with Christ. In short, he was alive and not alive. He had no hope, no future, no faith in happiness. He felt himself hemmed about with darkness, and to be groping for a way out of it.

Petronius noted how altered Vinicius' face was; he remarked the manner in which Vinicius kept throwing out

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hands which seemed to be feeling for a road through the gloom. And as he noted these things he grew thoughtful. Suddenly he rose, approached his friend, and said as he ruffled the hair behind his ears:

"Do you know, you have grey hairs on your temples."

"It is possible," replied Vinicius. "Nor should I be altogether surprised to see my head turn grey all over."

A silence followed. On more than one previous occasion Petronius had been led to meditate concerning life; but though, in general, the life lived by himself and his companion might, externally, be happy or unhappy, internally it had always been without a care. Nevertheless, just as a thunderbolt or an earthquake can overturn a temple, so can misfortune wreck an existence, even though, taken by itself, it be built on lines at once pure, harmonious, and simple. No; in Vinicius' words there was something else. For the first time in his life Petronius found himself faced with a series of intellectual enigmas which no one had previously sought to solve. Though clever enough to appreciate their importance, his subtlety of mind could find no answer to them. At length, after a long silence, he said:

"These things must be sorcery."

"The same thought has occurred to me," replied Vinicius.

"Many times have I conceived them to be sorcery."

"Then how would it be if you were to go to the priests of Scrapis? Certainly, among them, as among all priests, there are *some* impostors: yet have I known these good men to get to the bottom even of the strangest mysteries."

Yet Petronius spoke without conviction or assurance, for in his heart he felt that, even as he uttered the words, they sounded vain, and even ridiculous.

Vinicius frowned and said:

"Sorcery, indeed? I have seen sorcerers make use of infernal forces, and derive a profit from so doing. I have seen other sorcerers have recourse to those forces as a means for injuring their enemies. But the Christians, they live in poverty, and they *pardon* their enemies. Yes, they preach humility, virtue, and compassion. What benefit, therefore, would sorcery be to *them*? What need would *they* have to make use of spells?"

Petronius was beginning to feel irritated with what his intellect could not fathom. However, unwilling to accept his companion's view, he said, by way of making an answer of some sort: "It is a curious sect." Then he added: "By the divine lady of the Paphian fastnesses, the tenets of the sect spell ruin to life. If *you* can admire such goodness and virtue, all *I* can say is that these people are

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rascals, and that they are as inimical to life as are death and disease. Of the latter we have enough already without the Christians adding to them. Reckon up for yourself the ills of life. We have Cæsar, Tigellinus, Cæsar's verses, shops kept by rascals who lord it over the descendants of the ancient Quirites, and freedmen who hold seats in the Senate! By Castor, is not that enough? No, the Christians are a pernicious and damnable sect. Have you made any attempt to shake off this depression, and to make some use of life? "

" Yes, I have tried."

Petronius burst out laughing.

" Ah, traitor!" he said. " Slaves lose no time in diffusing tidings. You have been robbing me of Chrysothemis, have you not? "

Vinicius nodded with an expression of disgust.

" In any case I thank you," continued Petronius. " In fact, I am going to send her a pair of slippers embroidered with pearls: which, in my language of love, signifies, ' You may take your departure.' I am doubly grateful to you—firstly, for having refused Eunice, and, secondly, for having rid me of Chrysothemis. Listen to me. Before you you see a man who used to rise early in the morning, to bathe, to banquet himself, to make full use of Chrysothemis, to write satires, and even, at times, to interlard his prose with verses. Yet all the while that man was as weary of existence as is Cæsar, and frequently at a loss how to banish his gloomy thoughts. Why was this? Because I used to go searching far and wide for what lay ready to my hand. A beautiful woman is worth her weight in gold; but a woman who, in addition, adores one is beyond price altogether. Such a woman is not to be purchased with the wealth of Verres. Consequently what I say to myself is this: I intend to fill my life with happiness even as I fill a cup with fine wine; and of that happiness I intend to drink until my hand has become lifeless and my lips have turned pale. Then let what may come, come. There you have my new philosophy."

" It is what you have always professed. It includes nothing new."

" It includes a definite programme; which, before, was lacking."

This said, Petronius called for Eunice. She entered clad in white, and smiled under her golden locks. Petronius opened his arms to her, and said:

" Come! "

She ran to him, and, seating herself upon his knee, laid her head upon his breast—her cheeks visibly blushing, and

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her eyes veiled in mist. Together the pair constituted a wonderful picture of love and happiness. Petronius stretched out his hand towards a plate, took therefrom a handful of violets, and sprinkled them over Eunice's head, breast, and mantle. Then he uncovered her shoulders, and said:

"Happy is the man who, like myself, has found love enclosed in such a casket! Sometimes I fancy that we are a pair of deities. Look at her. Did ever Praxiteles, Miro, Scopas, or Lysias conceive more perfect lines of beauty? Exists there in Paros or in Pentelicus a marble as warm, as rosy, as voluptuous as her flesh?"

He let his lips wander over Eunice's neck and shoulders, while she shivered with delight, and her eyelids quivered. Presently Petronius turned to Vinicius again.

"And now," he said, "think of your gloomy Christians, and compare their worth with hers. If you cannot see the difference, go and rejoin them. But this spectacle ought at least to have cured you."

Vinicius' nostrils were full of the scent of the violets in which the room was bathed. He turned pale as he reflected that, had he been permitted to pass his lips over *Lygia's* shoulders, he would have been glad, in return for that almost sacrilegious happiness, to let the world crumble into dust. Used to taking swift stock of what was passing through his mind, he recognised that even at that moment his thoughts were of *Lygia*, and of her alone.

"Eunice, divine one," said Petronius, "let us have the morning meal prepared, and garlands brought us."

To Vinicius he added:

"I was for freeing the girl; but what, think you, she replied? 'I would rather be your slave than Cæsar's wife!' Upon that I freed her without her knowledge—the prætor doing me the favour of not requiring her presence at the ceremony. She does not know that she is free, even as she does not know that, should I die, this mansion and all my jewels, save the precious stones, will be hers."

He rose and began to pace the room.

"Love," he continued, "transforms people into new guises—neither more nor less. Myself it has transformed in this way. Formerly I used to adore the scent of verbenæ; but since Eunice prefers violets, I have forced myself to rate them above every other perfume."

Halting before Vinicius, he asked him:

"What of yourself? Do you still hold to the odour of spikenard?"

"Pray trouble me no further," replied the young man.

"I wished to show you Eunice, and to speak of her, for

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the reason that perhaps you too are seeking far and wide for what lies ready to your hand. It may be that for you too a faithful, simple heart is beating in the bosom of one of your slaves. Apply, then, that balm to your wounds. You say that Lygia loves you. Possibly she does so. But what sort of a love is it that denies itself? Does not that signify that there is something stronger than such affection? No, dear friend. Lygia is not Eunice."

"Everything in life is equally a torment," replied Vinicius. "When I saw you covering Eunice's shoulders with kisses it occurred to me that, had Lygia ever bared her shoulders to me, I should have lived my life to the full. Yet the thought caused me to become seized with a kind of fear—as though I had assaulted a Vestal Virgin, or attempted to sully a goddess. No, Lygia is *not* Eunice, although the difference between them seems to me otherwise than as you see it. Love has changed your sense of smell, and made you prefer violets to verbenas; but in my case it has changed my very soul, so that, for all my passion and my misery, I would not have Lygia be like other women."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"Then you lose nothing by your abstinence. However, the whole thing is beyond my understanding."

To which Vinicius replied in haste:

"Yes, yes! We no longer understand each other."

A silence followed.

"May Hades swallow every Christian in the land!" suddenly exclaimed Petronius. "They have brought you nothing but trouble, while, in addition, they have destroyed your taste for life. Yes, may Hades swallow the whole band of them! You make a mistake in thinking that their doctrine is beneficent. Only that is beneficent which gives pleasure, which furnishes beauty, love, and strength; whereas the Christians aver that such things are vanities. Also, you are wrong in thinking that they are a just sect. If we return good for evil, what are we to render for good? And if the sanction for the one is identical with the sanction for the other, why should men be good at all?"

"No; the sanction is *not* identical. According to the Christian doctrine, it begins in the future life, which is eternal."

"Into those considerations I cannot enter, seeing that we cannot verify them until the hereafter has arrived—provided that we *can* verify them when we no longer have eyes to see with. In the meanwhile these people are fools, and the future cannot possibly belong to them."

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"For them life begins with death."

"Which is as much as to say that day begins with night. Do you still intend to carry off Lygia?"

"No. I cannot return her evil for good, and I have sworn not to do so."

"Then you purpose to adopt the Christian doctrine?"

"I should like to, but my whole nature is opposed to it."

"Lastly, could you ever forget Lygia?"

"No."

"Then go and travel."

At this moment some slaves came to announce that the morning meal was ready, and Petronius continued as the two friends proceeded to the triclinium:

"True, you have already seen *part* of the world, but only as a soldier who is forced to hasten to a given destination, and has no time to halt on the way. Come with us, therefore, to Achæa, for Cæsar has not yet abandoned the idea of this expedition. He will keep stopping, and singing, and collecting laurel wreaths, and plundering temples, until finally he returns hither in triumph. The procession will be one of Bacchus and of Apollo combined into a single deity! Augustans, and Augustans, and thousands of lute-players! By Castor, it will be a sight worth seeing!"

He stretched himself upon a divan by the side of Eunice, while a slave advanced to place upon his head a garland of anemones.

"What did you see when serving under Corbulo?" he continued. "Why, nothing at all! Were you able to visit Greek temples as I myself did for a space of two years—passing from the hands of one guide to the hands of another? Have you ever been to Rhodes where the Colossus rears its immensity? Have you, at Panopeus in Phocis, viewed the clay with which Prometheus fashioned men? Have you, at Sparta, seen the eggs laid by Leda, or, at Athens, the celebrated Sarmatian cuirass which is made of horse-hooves, or, in Eubœa, Agamemnon's ship, or the cup which was moulded on the model of Helen's left breast? Have you seen Alexandria, Memphis, the Pyramids, the hair which Isis tore from her head while bewailing Osiris? Have you heard the groans of Memnon? Yes, the world is wide, and its centre is not here. I am going to accompany Cæsar, but on the way home I shall leave him, and make for the island of Cyprus; since my lady here—she of the golden locks—wills that at Paphos we are to make a joint offering of doves to the local goddess. And I would have you know that whatsoever Eunice wishes to be done must be carried out."

"But I am your slave," interrupted Eunice; whereupon,

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laying her head upon his breast, Petronius said with a smile:

"Then I am the slave of a slave. I adore you, my divinity, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head."

Then he added to Vinicius:

"Come you too to Cyprus; but first of all remember that you must see Cæsar. It is unfortunate that at the present juncture you have not already paid your respects to him. Tigellinus is capable of twisting the circumstance against you. True, he bears you no personal hatred, but, for all that, he cannot exactly love you, seeing that you are my nephew. However, we will say that you have been ill; and likewise we must debate what answer we are to make if Nero should begin questioning you concerning Lygia. The best thing will be for you to shrug your shoulders, and say that you kept her in your house until you grew tired of her. Nero will understand that. Also you might add that illness has confined you to the house, that the fever grew worse through your disappointment at being prevented from going to Neapolis to hear him sing, and that the hope of shortly hearing him has hastened your recovery. No, you need not be afraid of drawing the long bow. Tigellinus has announced that he is preparing for Cæsar's delectation something not only great, but more prodigious than heretofore. Yet I scent in it a snare set for myself. Also I distrust your own frame of mind."

"Would you be surprised to hear," said Vinicius, "that there are people in the world who have no fear of Cæsar—who live as calmly as though he did not exist?"

"I suppose you mean the Christians?"

"Yes, and only them. For what is our life but a perpetual reign of terror?"

"A truce to your Christians. The reason why *they* do not fear Cæsar is that he has never heard of their existence. In any case he knows nothing about them, and is interested in them only as much as he might be in a dead leaf. Once more I tell you that they are fools, that you can perceive that for yourself, and that if your nature rebels from following their doctrine it is because you *do* perceive their imbecility. You are a man of a different clay altogether. Speak of them no more, nor give them another thought. We know how to live, and we know how to die. But what do *they* know? What, indeed?"

These words made such an impression upon Vinicius that, on his return home, he began to think that perhaps the Christians' goodness and compassion were but proofs of the feebleness of their souls. It seemed to him that men

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who were strong and well-tempered could not so easily pardon their enemies. Hence, doubtless, the repugnance of his soul—the soul of a Roman—to the Christian doctrine. “We know how to live, and we know how to die,” Petronius had said. And they? They knew but how to forgive. And that was only because they understood neither true love nor genuine hatred.

VIII

CÆSAR by no means liked returning to Rome, and before many days were over again expressed a desire to leave for Achæa. He even published an edict announcing that his absence would be brief, and that public affairs would not suffer in the meanwhile. Then, accompanied by some Augustans, including Vinicius, he repaired to the Capitol, for the purpose of offering sacrifice to the gods and thanking them for having favoured his last expedition. On the morrow, when he visited the sanctuary of Vesta, there occurred an incident which profoundly modified his future plans. Though Nero did not believe in the gods, he feared them, and, most of all, the mysterious Vesta. At the sight of that deity and her sacred fire his hair suddenly bristled, his jaw fell, a shudder ran through his frame, and he fainted in the arms of Vinicius, who chanced to be just behind him. At once the monarch was carried out of the temple, and back to the palace, where he kept to his bed for the remainder of the day. Then he announced, to the great astonishment of all present, that he had definitely deferred his journey to a later date, since the goddess had secretly warned him against haste. Within an hour there followed a public proclamation to the effect that Cæsar, beholding the downcast mien of the citizens, and guided by his paternal love for them, was going to remain in their midst, that he might share their sorrows and their joys. Enchanted with this resolve (a possible forerunner of games and of distributions of grain), the people assembled *en masse* before the Porta Palatina, uttering cries in honour of the divine Cæsar, who was engaged in playing dice with his Augustans.

“Yes, I have found it necessary to put off my journey,” he said. “Egypt and the sovereignty of the Orient cannot escape me, if the prophets speak true, nor, consequently, of Achæa. I intend to pierce the Isthmus of Corinth, as well to raise monuments in Egypt which will make the Pyramids look toys by comparison. Also, I am going to construct a Sphinx seven times as large as that which now gazes into

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the Memphian desert; and the new Sphinx shall have my features, so that the centuries to come will speak of my monument and of myself."

"But, through your verses, you have already erected a monument, not seven times, but thrice seven times, as large as the Pyramid of Cheops," said Petronius.

"And my singing?" asked Nero.

"Ah, would that a statue could be erected like the statue of Memnon, but one that should be able, at sunrise, to speak with your voice! Were that carried out, for thousands of centuries the seas which border Egypt would swarm with vessels which had transported thither multitudes from the three quarters of the world—multitudes come to lose themselves in ecstasy as they listened to your singing."

"Alas," said Nero, "who would be capable of executing such a work?"

"At least you might have executed in basalt a group representative of yourself driving a quadriga."

"True. I will have that group made."

"What a superb gift to humanity!"

"And in Egypt I intend to marry Luna, who is a widow, and so become a god myself."

"Yes; and you shall give us women for stars, and we will form a new constellation which shall be known as the Constellation of Nero. Vitellius you shall marry to the Nile, in order that he may beget hippopotami; and Tigellinus you shall wed to the desert, in order that he may become king of the jackals."

"And I—what am I to become?" asked Vatinius.

"May the blessing of the bull Apis rest upon you! You arranged such splendid games for us at Beneventum that I cannot find it in my heart to wish you evil. You shall make a pair of boots for the Sphinx; whose feet are apt to grow cold at night during the rainy season. Also, you shall make boots for the colossi which line the avenues leading to the temples. Yes, every man will find in Egypt his appropriate sphere. For instance, Domitius Afer shall be treasurer, since he is known for his honesty. That Cæsar is once more dreaming of Egypt I am delighted to hear. My only regret is that he has so long put off the journey."

"Your mortal eyes," said Nero, "are blind and unable to see Vesta, for the deity never shows herself to the profane. When I was standing in her temple she approached me and whispered in my ear: 'Postpone your expedition.' This happened so suddenly that terror seized me, even though I ought to have been expressing gratitude to the gods for according me their manifest protection."

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"Your terror was shared by all of us," said Tigellinus; "and the Vestal Rubria even fainted."

"Rubria?" exclaimed Nero. "What a snow-white neck she has!"

"Yes; and she blushed at the sight of the divine Cæsar."

"Yes, I remarked that. 'Tis strange that a Vestal should. In every virgin there is something of the divine, and Rubria is beautiful in addition."

After a moment's reflection, Nero added:

"Tell me why men fear Vesta as they fear no other deity? I myself, the Supreme Priest, was seized with dread in her presence. I can only remember that I fainted, and should have fallen to the ground but for some one who supported me. Who was that some one?"

"It was I," replied Vinicius.

"Ah! So it was you, stern son of Mars? Why did you not come to Beneventum? I am told that you have been ill; and in very truth you look changed. Also I have heard that Croto attempted to assassinate you. Is that so?"

"Yes. He broke my arm, but I got the better of him."

"With your broken arm?"

"Yes; and with the help of a certain barbarian who was stronger even than Croto."

Nero looked astonished.

"Stronger even than Croto?" he said. "Surely you must be jesting? Croto had not his equal for strength, and the strongest man now is Styphax the Ethiopian."

"Nevertheless 'tis as I have told you, Cæsar. What this man can do I have seen with my own eyes."

"And where is this wonder? Has he not become king of the Grove of Nemora?"

"I know not, Cæsar. I have lost sight of him."

"Do you not even know to what race he belongs?"

"My arm was broken, and I never thought of questioning him."

"Then go and seek the fellow."

"I will make that *my* business," put in Tigellinus; but Nero continued to Vinicius:

"I thank you for having supported me in the temple. Otherwise I might have injured my head in falling. Once upon a time you were a good companion, but since the war in which you served under Corbulo you have become a savage, and I but rarely see you."

Nero paused a moment; then he resumed:

"How goes the maiden with the narrow hips—the maiden whom you used to love so much that I took her from the house of Aulus for your particular pleasure?"

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Vinicius found the question an awkward one to answer, but Petronius came to his rescue.

"I dare swear, my lord," said he, "that Vinicius has altogether forgotten her. You see what is the matter with him? Ask him how many maidens he has loved, and I dare wager that he will be unable to reply. The Viniciuses are good soldiers, but better gamecocks. They need a whole poultry-yard to themselves. Punish him, my lord, by not inviting him to the feast which Tigellinus has promised to give us in your honour on the lake of Agrippa."

"No, I will not do that. I have confidence in Tigellinus, and fully expect that he will be able to provide the desired poultry-yard."

"Could the Graces absent themselves when Love himself is present?" asked Tigellinus.

Of this Nero took no notice.

"I am weary of everything," he said. "To think that the goddess has bidden me stay in Rome, which I detest! No, I will go to Antium. I feel stifled in these narrow quarters, amid these mansions which are falling into decay, and these dirty alleys. The foul air of the city penetrates even into my gardens. If only an earthquake would destroy Rome! If only some angry god would raze the city to the ground, in order that I might show you how to build a city which should be fit to be the head of the world and my capital!"

"Cæsar," replied Tigellinus, "you say, 'If only some angry god would destroy the city!'"

"Yes. Well?"

"But are not you yourself a god?"

Nero shrugged his shoulders wearily, and retorted:

"We shall see what sort of an entertainment you are able to arrange for us on Agrippa's lake. Afterwards I shall go to Antium. You are men who are easily satisfied. You cannot understand how I thirst for the great."

With that he lowered his eyelids, as a hint that he needed rest; whereupon the Augustans began successively to take their leave. Petronius followed Vinicius out of the room.

"So you have been invited to take part in the feast," he said. "Ahenobarbus has given up his expedition, and, instead, is going to commit more follies than ever, and to wallow in the city as he does in his house. Devil take it, but we who have subdued the universe have a right to amuse ourselves after doing so. You, Marcus, are a fine young fellow, and it is to that fact, partly, that I attribute the weakness which I have for you. By Diana of Ephesus! If only you could see the arch of your eyebrows, and

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your figure eloquent of the ancient blood of the Quirites! Beside you we others look like freedmen. But for that barbarous doctrine of hers, Lygia would to-day be dwelling in your mansion. Do not again seek to prove to me that these Christians are not foes to life and mankind. True, they have treated you well, and you are at liberty to recognise the fact; but in your place I should still detest the sect, and seek pleasure wherever I could find it. I repeat that you are good to look upon, and that Rome is seething with divorced women "

"One thing only surprises me," replied Vinicius: "and that is that you have not grown tired of that sort of thing."

"Who told you that I have not? This many a day have I been tired of it. Only, I am not as young as you are. Moreover, I possess certain tastes which you do not. I love books, which you do not. I love poetry, which to you is a mere weariness. I love vases, and precious stones, and a multitude of things which you would not so much as look at. Also, I go in for pains in the kidneys, which you do not. Lastly, I have Eunice, and you possess nothing to equal her. I take delight in works of art, whereas nothing could ever make of you an æsthete. I know that I shall never find anything better in life than I have found already; whereas before yourself there still lies the hope of discovering something new. If death were suddenly to come rapping at your door, for all your courage, added to your disappointments in life, you would find yourself astonished that you had to quit the world so soon; whereas I should accept the inevitable end with the conviction that there is no fruit in the world of which I have not contrived to obtain at least a taste. I do not hurry, nor do I dally. I mean simply to live my life gaily to the end. The Sceptics are gay, and though, in my estimation, the Stoics rank as fools, at least their Stoicism tempers their characters; whereas your Christians only add to the world's gloom—and gloom is to life what rain is to nature. Do you know what I have just learnt? It is that for the festival which Tigellinus is about to give they are going to adorn the shores of Agrippa's lake with a number of brothels, and to stock them with some of the best families in Rome. Surely in those establishments you are likely to meet with a woman of sufficient beauty to console you? In addition there will be virgins who are to make their entry into society in the garb of nymphs. Likewise there still remains the whole Roman Empire. Already the weather is growing warmer, and the air, softened by the southerly winds, is unlikely to cause the nude ladies whom it is destined to caress at the festival to suffer from gooseflesh. Not a woman will be present who could find it

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in her heart to repulse you, my Narcissus—not a single one, even though she were a Vestal Virgin.”

Vinicius clasped his hands to his forehead.

“ Oh that I had not fallen in with the one exception ! ” he said.

“ Whose fault is it if it is not the fault of the Christians ? People whose symbol is a cross could not well do otherwise. Listen to me. Greece was beautiful in her day, and made wisdom her child, and we have made strength our offspring. But what, think you, will such a doctrine as that of the Christians ever bring forth ? If you know, tell me, for, by Pollux, the problem is beyond my solving.”

Vinicius shrugged his shoulders.

“ One would say that you were afraid of my becoming a Christian.”

“ No ; I am only afraid of your spoiling your life. If you cannot be Greece, then be Rome—that is to say, govern and enjoy. In our follies there is a grain of sense : and the reason of it is that our idea at least clears the air. I despise Ahenobarbus for aping the Greeks ; whereas if he but called himself Roman, I should recognise his reason for extravagance. Promise me that, if you should find a Christian awaiting you on your return home, you will pluck out his tongue. If, also, by chance, that Christian happens to be the physician Glaucus, he will not be in the least surprised. Farewell, then, until we meet again by the lake of Agrippa.”

IX

AROUND the thickets on the shores of Agrippa's lake prætorian guards had been stationed to keep the inquisitive mob from disturbing Cæsar and his guests. For it had been noised abroad that all the *élite* of wealth, beauty, and intellect were to be present at this festival—a festival which had no precedent in the city's annals. Tigellinus' main object was to keep Nero from going to Achæa, as well as to surpass every one who had ever before organised an entertainment in honour of Cæsar. With this end in view he had given orders, both during the expedition to Neapolis and at Beneventum, that the uttermost corners of the world should be ransacked for animals, rare fishes, birds, and plants, without counting the vases and stuffs which were to grace the festival with added splendour. In this work of preparation the entire revenues of the provinces had been exhausted : but that was a detail which the Imperial favourite had no need to consider. Every day

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his influence was growing greater. Possibly he was no more beloved of Nero than were the other Augustans; but he possessed the knack of making himself daily more indispensable. Though Petronius, his superior in manners, intelligence, and wit, knew better how to keep Cæsar amused with conversation, he (Petronius), unfortunately, eclipsed his lord, and so provoked his jealousy. Nor could Petronius be used as a blind instrument in the way that Cæsar, a man ever sensitive to criticism, would have liked to use him. The mere name, "The Arbiter of Fashion," was sufficient to hurt Nero's conceit. For who had a right to such a name if it was not he, Cæsar? Moreover, Tigellinus had sufficient cunning to make good the qualities which he lacked; with the result that, aware of the fact that he could not vie with Petronius or Lucan or any of the men who were distinguished for birth, talents, or knowledge, he had resolved to eclipse them all by dint of servility and the display of an unprecedented degree of luxury.

In pursuance of this aim he had had the tables for the festival arranged on a huge raft that was constructed of gilded logs; and around the borders of this raft were splendid shells which he had caused to be brought from the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean—shells brilliant with the hues of pearls and of the rainbow. Also, on the shores of the lake were grouped palm-trees, groves of lotus, and rose bushes in full bloom; while in the midst of these there were arranged fountains of scented water, statues of gods and goddesses, and gold and silver cages containing birds of various colours. In the centre of the raft was pitched a huge pavilion—or, rather, lest the view of the revellers should be obstructed, the roof of a pavilion, woven of Syrian purple, and supported on silver poles. Under this roof there gleamed as bright as the sun a number of tables for the guests, and, on the tables, Alexandrian glass, crystal, and priceless plate of different sorts—all brought from Italy, Greece, or Asia Minor. Furthermore, the raft—which, owing to its accumulation of foliage, resembled, rather, an island garden—was tied by gold and purple ropes to boats which, shaped like fishes, swans, seagulls, or flamingos, contained, seated at painted oars, a number of nude rowers of both sexes. These rowers were all of remarkable beauty of form and feature, and wore their hair either dressed in the Oriental fashion or gathered together under golden nets. The moment that Cæsar, on arriving at the raft with Poppæa and his Augustans, had seated himself beneath the purple pavilion, the oars struck the water, the boats sprang forward, the golden ropes ran taut, and the structure, bearing the feast and the feasters,

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began to sail in circles around the lake. Other boats then surrounded it—boats that were filled with female harpists and lute-players whose rosy bodies, reflected against the blue of the sky, or mirrored, with their golden instruments, in the depths of the water, seemed to merge both with the blueness of the heavens and with their own reflection, and to change and glow like so many magic flowers.

From the thickets on the shores of the lake, as well as from strange buildings constructed for that day alone, came the sounds of music and song. The woodlands and all the neighbourhood rang with melody, and echoes bore the notes of horns and trumpets far and wide. Even Cæsar—who sat with Poppæa on one side of him, and Pythagoras on the other—was amazed; more especially when among the boats there appeared young slave girls, dressed as sirens, with green network over their bodies to imitate scales. Indeed, Nero did not spare his praises of Tigellinus. Yet in the very act of uttering them the force of habit caused him constantly to watch Petronius' eye, in the hope of ascertaining what "The Arbiter" thought of it all. For a while Petronius appeared indifferent to the spectacle; until, at length, in reply to a direct question, he responded:

"In my opinion, my lord, ten thousand naked virgins make less impression upon one's senses than does a single naked maiden."

Cæsar, however, was delighted with the floating banquet. At least it was something new. Dishes were served which would have put to shame even the inventiveness of an Apicius, as well as so many different wines that Otho, in whose palace it had been the custom to drink no less than eighty brands, would have sought to conceal his mortification under the table. Among the guests Vinicius was pre-eminent for his good looks. Formerly his face and person had indicated too clearly the professional soldier; whereas now disappointment and physical suffering had refined his features as effectively as though they had been touched by the delicate hand of a sculptor. Also, his complexion had lost its tan, while still it retained the golden sheen of Numidian marble. His eyes, also, looked larger, and were charged with an air of melancholy, and though his torso had preserved the powerful outlines that seemed made to bear a cuirass, the head which surmounted that torso was as delicate and proud in its bearing as ever. Indeed, in saying that not a single woman among the Augustans could prove a rebel in Vinicius' hands, Petronius had spoken as a man of experience, for every woman

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present had her eyes fixed upon his nephew. Even Poppæa and the Vestal Rubria (the latter was present at the banquet by Cæsar's special desire) formed no exception to this rule.

Before long the ice-cooled wines began to warm the hearts and heads of the feasters. At every moment fresh boats, shaped like locusts or like dragon-flies, would put off from the wooded shores, while over them, at the ends of golden cords, fluttered quantities of Indian and African birds. The sun had now traversed a large portion of the heavens, and the beautiful spring day had been warm even to sultriness. The raft swung gently to the cadence of the oars. Not a breath of wind stirred the motionless foliage around the lake as the floating structure glided onwards with its freight of guests. The latter were growing momentarily more drunken and more noisy. Already they had ceased to preserve the order at table in which they had first sat down, since Cæsar himself had set them the example by rising and displacing Vinicius from his seat near Rubria; after which the monarch had fallen to whispering in the Vestal's ear. Vinicius then found himself next to Poppæa, who lost no time in extending to him her arm, in order that he might fasten the clasp of her robe. The tribune's hand trembled a little as he did so; whereupon she bent towards him, and, with a half-confused look under her long, lowered eyelashes, shook her golden head as though to betoken a refusal.

By this time the sun, swollen and red, was sinking behind the treetops. For the most part the guests were thoroughly intoxicated, and the raft had begun to circle nearer the shore, where, among trees and flowers, groups of men, disguised as fauns or satyrs, were playing on flageolets, pipes of Pan, and tambourines, while young girls, dressed as nymphs, dryads, or hamadryads, were flitting hither and thither. The oncoming of dusk was saluted with cries in honour of Luna, and suddenly the woodlands became brilliant with thousands of lamps. From houses of assignation which had been built along the shore there issued a blaze of light, while on the terraces of these structures wives and daughters of the first families in Rome could be seen parading their triumphant nudity, and soliciting Cæsar's guests both with voice and gesture. At length the raft touched land, and, rushing into the thickets, Cæsar and his Augustans surrounded the houses of assignation, the tents, and the grottoes. Every one seemed to have gone mad. What then became of Cæsar no one knew, any more than it was known who was senator, soldier, mountebank, or musician. Satyrs and fauns could be heard uproariously

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pursuing the nymphs, and breaking lamps with their thyrsi in order to plunge the scene into darkness. Already in certain portions of the surrounding groves no light was visible, and from these quarters came the sounds of piercing cries, of laughter, of murmuring, and of panting breath.

Vinicius was not intoxicated as he had been at the banquet in Cæsar's palace; yet, for the moment, what was going on around him had dimmed even the memory of Lygia. In his veins the fever of pleasure blazed once more, and, darting into the woods, he joined his companions in searching for a dryad to suit his taste. At every moment groups of divinities would brush past him as they trailed in their wake a troupe of satyrs, senators, fauns, and knights. At length he caught sight of a procession of virgins, headed by one dressed as Diana; and, rushing in their direction, in order to get a closer view of the goddess, he suddenly felt his heart stop beating. For a moment he seemed to recognise Lygia herself in the deity with the golden cross! Gaily the bevy surrounded him as they danced; after which, to stimulate pursuit, they took to flight like a herd of does. True, this Diana turned out *not* to be Lygia, nor even to be like her; yet Vinicius remained where he was, half suffocated with emotion.

Suddenly there came over him an immense longing to be near his beloved. Never had she seemed to him more pure—never to him had she been dearer than amid this scene of folly and wild debauchery. A few minutes earlier he had been willing to drain a garlanded cup; but now he felt only repulsion and disgust. Shame stifled him; he could hardly draw his breath; the very stars seemed to have left the sky.

No, he would flee this dark, dim thicket. Hardly had he gone ten paces before he saw before him the figure of a veiled woman. A couple of hands were laid upon his shoulders, and an eager voice murmured in his ear:

"I love you! Come! No one will see us! Hasten, hasten!"

Vinicius seemed to awake as from a dream.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The woman pressed the closer to him as she repeated:

"Hasten, hasten! See how completely we are alone here. I love you, I love you!"

"Again, I say, who are you?"

"Guess."

Throwing her arms around Vinicius' neck, the woman pressed her veiled lips to his.

"It is a night for love, a night for sport!" she said,

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breathing heavily. "To-night all things are permitted. Take me to yourself."

The only effect of the kiss was to disgust him the more. Both his thoughts and his heart were elsewhere. In all the world there was no woman but Lygia. He pushed away the veiled phantom.

"Whoever you be," he said, "I love another, and have no desire for your caresses."

The phantom leant towards him, and said:

"Raise my veil."

But, even as she spoke, a sound came from among the neighbouring myrtle-trees, and the phantom fled away with a strange, malicious laugh.

The newcomer was Petronius.

"I have seen and heard all," he said.

"Then let us go," was Vinicius' reply.

Passing the glittering houses of assignation, the groves, and the cordon of mounted guards, they soon arrived where their litters were awaiting them.

"I will come home with you," remarked Petronius; whereupon they entered the same litter. Not a word more was spoken until, as they were entering the atrium of Vinicius' mansion, Petronius inquired:

"Do you know who the woman was?"

"Rubria?"

"No."

"Who, then?"

Petronius lowered his voice.

"True," he said, "the sacred fire of Vesta has been profaned, for Rubria has lain with Cæsar; but she who spoke to you was"—and he lowered his voice still more—"the divine Augusta!"

A short silence followed.

"Cæsar," resumed Petronius, "found himself unable to hoodwink Poppæa as to his mad passion for Rubria; and possibly Poppæa was moved by a desire to retaliate. I purposely disturbed you, for the reason that, had you recognised Augusta and *then* rejected her, you would have been lost beyond recall, as would Lygia and, perhaps, myself."

"Ah!" burst out his companion, "I have had enough of Rome, of Cæsar, of festivals, of Augusta, of Tigellinus, of you all! I feel stifled. I cannot go on with this life. I simply cannot. Do you understand?"

"Yes. I understand that you are losing your head—that you are letting your better judgment and moderation fall into abeyance."

"In all the world I love only Lygia."

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"Well?"

"Consequently I wish for no other love; I wish for no more of this life—of your banquets, of your debaucheries, of your crimes."

"What has happened to you? Have you become a Christian?"

The younger man clasped his head in his hands, and exclaimed despairingly:

"No, not yet, alas! No, not yet!"

X

As Petronius returned home he shrugged his shoulders and felt in a very bad humour; for it had just dawned upon him that he and Vinicius no longer spoke the same language.

Hitherto Petronius had exercised an enormous influence over the young soldier. In everything he had served him as a model. Again and again a few ironical words from the lips of the older man had had the effect of causing the junior to adopt, or to refrain from, a given course of action. Now, however, this influence had come to an end, and Petronius had seen that the methods which formerly proved efficacious had lost their utility. He was too experienced a sceptic not to recognise that he no longer held the key to that soul.

"Suppose Augusta has for Vinicius, not merely a passing fancy, but a strong passion—well, one of two things must happen: either he will not resist her, and some unforeseen accident will ruin him, or (which is the more likely, in view of his present condition) he will spurn her—in which case his ruin is certain. Moreover, in the latter event Augusta would involve us all in her displeasure, and cause the balance to swing over to Tigellinus' side."

Regarded from every point of view, things were going ill. Petronius was a man of courage—he had no fear of death; but unless something tangible was to be gained by such a course, he saw no use in provoking Poppæa's wrath. Upon reflection he decided that the best way out of it was to get Vinicius to travel. He would spread it abroad that the young tribune was again in ill health, and so avert the danger which was threatening both Vinicius and himself. Probably Poppæa was uncertain as to whether or no she had been recognised by Vinicius; wherefore, as things stood, her self-love would have suffered no great hurt. But it would be well to guard against the future, and Petronius wished, beyond all things, to gain time; for he felt that,

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once Cæsar had set out for Achæa, Tigellinus, who knew nothing about works of art, would have to take a secondary place in Nero's favour.

The idea even occurred to Petronius that, if only he could get Cæsar to issue an edict of expulsion against the Christians, Lygia would leave Rome with her co-religionists, and be followed by Vinicius, without the necessity of offering him any further inducement to travel. Certainly the scheme was *possible*. Not so long ago the troubles which the Jews had caused through their hatred of the Christians had led Claudius—who had been unable to distinguish the one denomination from the other—to expel the former wholesale.

Why, therefore, should not Nero make a similar clearance of the Christians? Certainly it would render the air of Rome easier to breathe. Since the night of the floating banquet Petronius saw Nero daily, whether in the palace or in other mansions; and, consequently, to insinuate such an idea into his brain would be mere child's play—more especially seeing that Cæsar never rejected an idea which involved death and ruin. This was how the scheme could be worked. He, Petronius, would give a banquet in his house, and induce Cæsar to seize the occasion to publish the edict. Moreover, Petronius had reason to suppose that he (Petronius) would be entrusted with the execution of the said edict; in which case he would dispatch Lygia, with all the care due to Vinicius' beloved, to, say, Baiæ, where the pair could indulge their passion for one another, as well as play at being Christians, to their hearts' content.

At length Petronius learnt from Cæsar's own mouth that in three days' time a departure was to be made for Antium; and, next day, he went to tell his nephew the news.

Upon that Vinicius showed Petronius a list of the invités, which one of Cæsar's freedmen had brought him that morning.

"My name is included in it," remarked the young man; "and yours also. When you return home you will probably find a similar list awaiting you."

"If I had not seen my name among those of the invited guests," said Petronius, "I should have known that I might at any moment expect to receive my sentence of death. But I do not expect to receive it until after the expedition to Achæa, for the reason that in that country I shall be useful to Nero."

Then he ran through the list of names, and added:

"Hardly are we home than we have to turn out again, and depart for Antium! However, what must be must be. An invitation of this sort is also a command."

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"And if any one were to disobey it?"

"He would receive an invitation of another sort—an invitation to depart upon a far longer journey, to a destination whence there is no return. Why in the world could you not take my advice, and get clear of Rome while there was yet time? Now you have no choice but to go to Antium."

"Now I have no choice but to go to Antium. You see for yourself the times in which we live, and what wretched slaves we are."

"Is it to-day only that you have discovered this?"

"No; but, look you, you have sought to prove to me that the Christian doctrine is the enemy of life, and binds men in chains. Could any heavier chains exist than those which we are now bearing? You say also that Greece begat beauty and wisdom, and that Rome has begotten strength: but *where* is our strength?"

"Ask Chilo that question. For myself, I have no wish to play the philosopher. By Hercules, *I* did not create the times, nor am I responsible for them! Let us speak, rather, of Antium. Rest assured that great danger is dogging your footsteps, and that it would be better for you to try a tussle with the Ursus who strangled Croto than to go thither."

Vinicius made a gesture of indifference.

"Danger?" he exclaimed. "Why, at every moment we are groping our way through the shadow of death; and at every moment some head disappears in the darkness."

"Must I, then, run through the list of those who, because they have had prudence, have, despite Tiberius, Caligula, Claudius, and Nero, lived to be eighty or ninety years old? Look at Domitius Afer. Thief though he is, he has attained a peaceful old age."

"That is because—" began Vinicius. Then he broke off, and scanned the names of Nero's invités.

"Tigellinus, Vatinius, Sextus Africanus, Aquilinus Regulus, Sullius Nerulinus, Eprius Marcellus, and so on. What a collection of rogues and rascals! And to say that it is *they* who govern the world! Would it not be better for them to go parading some Egyptian or Syrian deity through the provincial towns, and jingling sistra, and earning their livelihood as fortune-tellers and conjurors?"

"Yes; or as exhibitors of learned monkeys, calculating dogs, and flute-playing asses. But let us speak of graver matters. I have reported at the Palatine that you have been ill; but since your name appears on this list, it would seem that some one else has used his or her influence to obtain its insertion. Yet Nero will have attached no importance

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to the name, since, in his eyes, you are merely a soldier with whom one can talk of races at the Circus, but who cares nothing for poetry or music. The fact of your name being on the list must therefore be attributed to Poppæa; and it signifies that her passion for you is not a mere whim. She means to make a thorough conquest of you."

"Then she is a bold woman."

"Yes, bold certainly, for she may ruin herself irretrievably. May Venus inspire her with a new affection as speedily as may be possible! But since she *does* covet you, you will need to be circumspect. Ahenobarbus is growing tired of her, and prefers Rubria and Pythagoras; yet out of sheer pique he would be capable of wreaking the most terrible vengeance upon you."

"When she met me in the thicket I had not a notion who she was; and you, who heard all, know what I said to her—namely, that I loved another, and had no desire for her."

"In the name of the infernal gods I beg of you not to lose what small remnant of reason the Christians have left you. If your life has become odious to you, open your veins here and now, or throw yourself upon your sword; for, should you offend Poppæa, you may meet with an end far less pleasant. Once upon a time it was a pleasure to talk to you. What is the real trouble? Why should you ruin yourself? Would your acceptance of Poppæa in any way prevent you from continuing to adore your Lygia? Moreover, remember that Poppæa has seen Lygia at the Palatine, and will the more easily discern who is the maiden for whose sake you have disdained the Imperial favours. In that case Augusta would unearth Lygia, even if the latter were hidden underground, and *you* would have brought about not only your own destruction, but also Lygia's. Do you understand that?"

Vinicius listened as though he were thinking of something else.

"I must see her," he said.

"Whom? Lygia?"

"Yes, Lygia."

"Do you know where she is?"

"No."

"Then are you going to resume your searching of the old cemeteries and the Trans-Tiberian quarter?"

"I do not know; but at all events I must see her."

"Very well. Though a Christian, perhaps she will show herself more reasonable than you are—and the more certainly if she does not wish to bring about your ruin."

Vinicius shrugged his shoulders.

"She saved me from the hands of Ursus," he said.

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"In that case, hasten, for Ahenobarbus will very shortly be departing. Sentences of death can be pronounced at Antium as well as here."

But Vinicius was not listening. He was thinking, rather, of how he could obtain an interview with Lygia.

Next day there occurred a circumstance which was likely to lighten the situation. That is to say, Chilo suddenly appeared on the scene.

He entered looking ragged and hungry; but since the servants had had orders to admit him at any hour of the day or night, they dared not bar his passage. He went straight into the atrium, and, planting himself before Vinicius, said:

"The gods send you immortality, and share with you the dominion of the world!"

At first Vinicius felt inclined to have him thrown out of doors; but it might be that the Greek knew something of Lygia, and therefore the young man's curiosity conquered his disgust.

"So it is you?" he said. "How have you been faring?"

"Badly, O son of Jupiter," replied Chilo. "True virtue is a commodity for which there is no demand nowadays, and a sage may think himself lucky if once a week he can go to the butcher's and get a sheep's head, and then water the joint with his tears as he sits squatting in his sorry hovel. My lord, all that you have given me I have spent upon the purchase of books at Atractus' emporium. Moreover, I have been robbed and ruined. The woman who was transcribing a record of my teachings has run away, and with her she has taken the remainder of what I owed to your generosity. I am a miserable wretch. Yet to whom to apply except to yourself, my lord—to you whom I love, to you whom I adore, to you for whom I have risked my life—I know not."

"What have you come to seek, and what have you brought with you?"

"I have come to implore your aid, O Baal, and I have brought with me my misery, my tears, my affection—as well as some news which my esteem for you has led me to gather. You will remember that one day I told you that I had bestowed a strand from Venus' girdle upon a slave of the divine Petronius? Well, I have been to call upon that slave, in order to see how she was faring—and you yourself, my lord, who know all that passes in that establishment, know also the position in it which Eunice now occupies. I have in my possession another such strand. For you have I kept it, my lord."

Then, perceiving the frown that was gathering on Vinicius'

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brow, the Greek broke off, and, to prevent a scene, added in hot haste:

"That is to say, my lord, I know where the divine Lygia is lodging. I will show you both the house and the street."

"Where is she, then?"

"With one Linus, the senior Christian priest. In her company also there is Ursus, who, as in former times, is working in the mill owned by Demas. He works there by night; wherefore, if the house were to be surrounded at that time, he would not be met with. Linus is an old man; while, in addition to him, there are only two old women in the building."

"Whence do you know this?"

"My lord, you will remember that the Christians once had me in their hands, and spared my life. Consequently be not surprised that my heart overflows with gratitude. I am a man of an older age, of better times, than the present. That is why I thought to myself: Ought I to neglect my former friends and benefactors? Why should I not find out what has become of them? First of all, my lord, I thought of *you*. Our last expedition ended in disaster; but can a son of Fortuna calmly accept the idea? No. I went and prepared the way for you to attain victory. The house is an isolated one. Upon you alone depends it that this very night a certain noble queen shall enter these walls of yours. Should that come about, do not forget that the poor hungry son of my father will have greatly contributed to the event."

The blood mounted to Vinicius' brain. Once more temptation shook his being to the core. Yes, the thing could be done, and, this time, should be done in safety. Once Lygia had become his mistress, what could she do save remain so for ever? Away with doctrines of every sort! What had he to do with the loving-kindness and the gloomy creed of the Christians? Was it not high time to shake himself free of all that? Was it not high time to begin life anew as it was lived by the rest of the world? As for what Lygia might do later, when she attempted to reconcile her new lot with her doctrine, that was an affair of secondary importance. Above all things she should be *his*, and that very day. It would remain to be seen whether, surrounded by a new world, and lapped in luxury and enjoyment, she would continue to let her doctrine rule supreme in her heart.

And all this might be realised that very day! The only thing that needed to be done was to retain Chilo, and to give him certain orders for the coming night. And then what? Why, endless happiness!

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"What has my life been hitherto?" thought Vinicius. "Continual suffering, an unsatisfied passion, and a series of questions awaiting answers. But *this* will do away with everything, and put an end to everything."

True enough, he remembered having sworn never again to lift his hand against her. But by what had he sworn? Not by the gods, since he no longer believed in them, nor by Christ, in whom he had not yet come to believe. For the rest, if she should take offence he would marry her, and so efface all wrongs. Yes, he felt that that course would become inevitable, since it was to her that he owed his life.

Next he recalled the day when, with Croto, he had penetrated to her retreat. Still could he see Ursus' fist hovering over him; still he remembered what followed. Again he beheld her bending over his bed, clad as a slave, and looking as beautiful as some kindly divinity. In spite of himself, he found his eyes turning towards the *lararium* — towards the little cross which she had left him before her departure. Was he, then, to repay her for this with a new assault? Was he to drag her by the hair to his *cubiculum*, as though she were a slave? How could he make up his mind to do such a thing? For it was not only that he desired her; he also *loved* her, and loved her simply because she was what she was. And suddenly he felt that it would not be enough simply to have her in his house, to be able to seize her in his arms. No; his love craved for something more than that: it craved for her *consent*. Blessed would his dwelling be if she were to enter it voluntarily! Blessed would be the moment, the day, when she did so! Blessed would be all the rest of his life! Their mutual happiness would resemble a boundless sea, and gleam as brightly as the sunshine! Yet to carry her off by force would be to kill that happiness, and at the same time to destroy, to sully, to render odious all that was dearest and most precious to him in life.

The mere thought filled him with horror. He glanced at Chilo, who was watching him carefully as he smoothed his hair and shuffled uneasily. For this former accomplice of his Vinicius felt an intense disgust. He would have liked to have crushed him as one might crush a venomous serpent. And since he could never be moderate in anything, he followed the impulse of his terrible Roman nature, and said as he turned to the Greek:

"I am not going to do as you advise: yet since you ought not to depart without having received your deserved reward, I am going to have you recompensed with three hundred strokes in my domestic penitentiary."

Chilo turned pale, but on Vinicius' handsome features

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there was stamped only cold resentment. Throwing himself upon his knees, the Greek doubled his form in two, and groaned in a broken voice:

"What, O King of Persia? What, O pyramid of grace, O colossus of mercy? Why should I be treated thus? I am an old man, and hungry and miserable. Besides, I have done you some service. Is it thus that you show your gratitude?"

"Yes; even as you have shown it to the Christians," retorted Vinicius; and he called to an attendant.

Convulsively Chilo seized the tribune by the knees, and said with his face turned deadly pale:

"My lord, my lord! I am an old man! Give me fifty strokes, not three hundred! Fifty will be enough! A hundred, then, not three hundred! Have mercy, have mercy!"

Vinicius repulsed him, and shouted an order. In a twinkling two powerful Quadi had seized the Greek by the few hairs which remained to him, wrapped up his head in his own rags, and dragged him away to the penitentiary.

"In the name of Christ!" cried Chilo from the threshold of the corridor; and once more Vinicius found himself alone.

The order which he had just given had excited and revived him. He made another attempt to unite and co-ordinate his scattered ideas, and felt greatly relieved and encouraged by the victory which he had gained over himself. It seemed to him that he had taken a long step towards Lygia's level, and would in some way be rewarded for it. At first his injustice to Chilo escaped his mind, although he had just ordered him to be flogged for the same motive as had formerly led him to reward the Greek; but he was still too Roman to be caused pain by the pain of others, or to trouble himself about a wretch like Chilo. If he had thought about it at all he would have considered that he had acted fairly in punishing the traitor. Presently his mind reverted to Lygia. "No," thought he, "I will not return you evil for good; and later, when you come to learn how I treated him who incited me to assault you, you will be grateful to me." Yet he could not help also asking himself whether, after all, Lygia *would* have approved of his treatment of Chilo. Did not the doctrine which she professed prescribe pardon? The Christians had pardoned this miserable fellow, even though they had had graver reasons than he, Vinicius, to revenge themselves. Chilo's cry, "In the name of Christ!" seemed to haunt his mind. Suddenly he remembered that it was a similar cry which had delivered Chilo out of the hands of the Lygian, and he resolved to remit the remainder of the punishment.

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With this intention he was about to summon his steward when the latter entered of his own accord, saying:

"My lord, the old man has fainted, and perhaps he is dead. Shall I continue the flogging?"

"No. When he recovers himself, send him to me."

The steward disappeared behind the curtain; but the Greek must have been hard to restore to consciousness, for Vinicius had almost reached the end of his patience when the slaves re-entered with Chilo, and, in obedience to a sign, retired.

Chilo was looking as white as a sheet, while from his legs long gouty drops of blood kept dripping to the mosaic floor of the atrium. Falling upon his knees, he groaned out:

"I thank you, my lord. You are pitiful and noble."

"You dog," retorted Vinicius, "take note that I have pardoned you only because of the Christ to whom I myself have owed my life."

"My lord, that Christ I will serve—yes, both him and you."

"Silence, and listen. But first rise to your feet. You are to come with me, and to show me the house where Lygia is lodging."

"But, my lord, I am starving. I will go with you, my lord, yes, I will go with you; but, for the moment, I lack strength. I pray you, give me the remnants of your dog's platter, and *then* I will accompany you."

Vinicius ordered him to be served with food, and also gratified him with a piece of gold and a cloak. Nevertheless Chilo was still too weak with hunger and the pain of the flogging to walk. Even after the meal which Vinicius gave him he failed in the attempt, despite his fears that Vinicius would mistake his weakness for obstinacy.

"Let but the wine have time to revive me," he kept saying with chattering teeth, "and *then* I shall be able to set out. Yes, I will go with you even to Magna Græcia."

At last he recovered his strength a little, and they departed. The way was long, for, like the majority of the Christian inhabitants of the Trans-Tiberian quarter, Linus lived not far from Miriam's dwelling. At length Chilo showed Vinicius a small isolated house which was surrounded by an ivy-covered wall.

"That is the place, my lord," said he.

"Very well," replied Vinicius. "Now go; but first of all listen to this. You are to forget that you have ever served me. You are to forget where Miriam, Peter, and Glaucus live. Lastly, you are to forget both this house and the Christians in general. Once a month you will come and see my freedman Demas, who will hand you two pieces of

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gold; but should you, on the other hand, go spying upon the Christians, I will have you flogged to death, or else handed over to the city prefect for the same purpose."

Chilo bowed and said:

"I will forget, even as you command."

Yet no sooner had Vinicius disappeared round the corner of the street than Chilo shook his fist after him, and cried:

"By Ate and all the Furies, I will *not* forget!"

Then again he lost consciousness.

XI

VINICIUS walked straight to the house tenanted by Miriam. At the door of it he encountered Nazarus, who evinced some perturbation at the sight of the tribune, in spite of the latter's civil greeting. Within were Miriam, Peter, Glaucus, Crispus, and Paul of Tarsus, who had recently returned from Fregella.

Vinicius' entry brought a look of surprise to the face of every one present.

"I salute you," said the young man, "in the name of the Christ to whom you pay honour."

"May His name be glorified throughout all ages!" was the reply.

"I know your many virtues," continued Vinicius, "and have proved your goodness of heart. That is why I come now as a friend."

"And as a friend will we receive you," replied Peter. "Seat yourself, my lord, and share with us our repast, for you are our guest."

"I will do so. But first of all listen to me. I wish you, Peter, and you, Paul of Tarsus, to have a token of my sincerity. I know where Lygia is. Only this moment I have been standing outside the house of Linus, which is situated not far from here. Still I hold over her the rights conferred upon me by Cæsar, while, in addition, I possess, in my various mansions, close upon five hundred slaves. Consequently it would have been an easy matter for me to have had her residence surrounded, and her person seized. Yet I have not done so, nor do I intend to engage in such a course."

"For that may the blessing of the Lord light upon you and purify your heart," said Peter.

"In former days, before I came among you, I should have seized her, and kept her by force; but your virtues, your doctrine—even though I myself do not profess it—have

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wrought in my soul a change, and I no longer dare resort to violence. Consequently I appeal to you, who stand to Lygia as father and mother, and say: give her to me for my wife, and in return I will swear that not only will I never forbid her to confess Christ, but I myself will study that doctrine."

As he spoke he held his head high, and his voice rang true and firm; yet also he was moved, and his knees trembled under the cloak that was looped to his girdle. A silence followed his words. Presently, as though to obviate an unfavourable reply, he resumed:

"I know what the obstacles are; yet I love her as I love the apple of my eye, and though I am not a Christian, I am a foe neither to yourselves nor to Christ. Another than I might have said to you, 'Baptise me'; but *my* only request to you is, 'Enlighten me.' I believe that Christ rose from the dead; and my reason for believing this is that those who affirm the fact are people who live in truth, and beheld Him after His death. I believe also—for I have proved it of my own experience—that your doctrine begets virtue, justice, and pity, and not the crimes of which men accuse you. Yet concerning these things I know little. I only know what I have learnt from your acts, from Lygia, and from the conversations which I have had with you. Nevertheless your doctrine has wrought in me a change. Formerly I ruled my servants with a rod of iron: now I show them pity. Formerly I loved pleasure: now I am able to flee with disgust from the lake of Agrippa. Formerly I had faith in violence: now I have renounced it. In short, I have come to detest orgies, wine, song, lute-playing, garlands of roses, and all the other sickening appurtenances of Cæsar's court. The thought that Lygia is as pure as the mountain snows makes me love her the more; and when I think also that it is owing to your doctrine that she is what she is I feel drawn towards its teachings, and would fain know more of them. Yet since I do not understand that doctrine, nor know whether I shall be able to conform to it, or to make my nature humble itself to your tenets, I continue to languish in uncertainty and torment."

Here his brows contracted in a wrinkle of pain, and the colour flamed to his cheeks. He continued, speaking ever faster and faster, and with growing emotion:

"You see how I stand. On the one hand I am tortured with love, and on the other hand with doubt. I have been told that your doctrine takes no account of life, of human joys, of happiness, of laws, or of the Roman dominion. Is it really so? Also, I have been told that you are madmen. Do you, then, regard it as a sin to love, to feel joy,

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to desire happiness? Are you enemies to life? Must I renounce Lygia? What is the truth which you preach? Your actions and your words are as pure as transparent water, but at the bottom of that water what lies there? Again, it has been said that Greece has begotten wisdom and beauty, and Rome has begotten strength: yet what *in reality* have Greece and Rome brought us? What is it that *you* bring? If within your doors there burns a light, I pray you open them to me."

In reply Peter said:

"We bring with us love."

And Paul of Tarsus added:

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal."¹

The heart of the aged Apostle was moved by this suppliant soul which, like a caged bird, was turning towards the sunlight. He stretched out his hands to Vinicius, and said:

"Knock, and it shall be opened unto you. The grace of the Lord be upon you, and in the Redeemer's name I now bless you and your soul and your love."

Hearing these words of benediction, Vinicius ran to Peter. Yes, the descendant of the Quirites who, until recently, had refused to look upon a foreigner as a human being, now seized the hands of the aged Galilean, and pressed them gratefully to his lips!

And Peter rejoiced, for he knew that he had gathered a soul the more into his net; while all present cried out with one voice:

"Glory be to God on high!"

Vinicius raised a beaming face.

"I see," he said, "that happiness *can* dwell among you, for I myself feel happy, as well as certain that you can bring me equal conviction on the remaining points. Yet cannot this take place in Rome, for Cæsar is leaving shortly for Antium, and I have received orders to follow in his train? To disobey is, as you know, to court death. Yet, if I have found favour in your eyes, come with me, and instruct me in your truth. At Antium you will be safer than I myself, for, lost in the crowd, you will be able to spread the faith at the very court of Cæsar. I have heard that Acte is a Christian, and that there are Christians also among the Prætorian Guards. I myself have seen soldiers kneeling before you, Peter, at the gate of the city. At Antium there stands one of my villas, and there we could assemble almost beneath Cæsar's eyes to hear your teaching. Glaucus

¹ 1 Corinthians xiii. 1.

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has told me that, to gain a single soul, you are ready to go to the ends of the earth. Do, then, for me what you have done for those whose needs have led you to quit far Judæa. Do not abandon my soul to death."

With joy those present thought of the victory gained by their doctrine, as well as of the effect which would be produced upon the pagan world by the conversion of an Augustan, a descendant of one of the oldest families in Rome. These people were ready to go to the ends of the earth to win a single soul, and had been doing this, and this alone, since the Master's death. Peter was the supreme pastor of the Christian community, and so debarred from leaving the capitol; but Paul of Tarsus (who had lately been sojourning at Aricium and Fregella, and was about to take a long journey through the East for the purpose of visiting the Churches, and inspiring them with new fervour) consented to accompany the young tribune to Antium, and thence to embark for Greece.

Though it saddened Vinicius to find that Peter, for whom he felt such an ardent affection, could not come with him, he thanked the Apostle cordially, and made of him a final request.

"Although," said he, "I know where Lygia is lodging, and so might have gone in person, as is befitting, to ask her to become my wife when my soul shall have become Christian—although, I say, I might have done this, I would prefer, O Apostle, to beg your permission to see her, or else your escort when I visit her for the purpose. How long I shall have to remain at Antium I do not know; nor, in Cæsar's presence, is any man sure of the morrow. Let me, therefore, see Lygia before I go; let me satisfy my eyes that she is here, and ascertain whether she can ever forget the wrong that I have done her, and whether she will be willing to share my happiness with me."

Peter smiled kindly.

"Who could refuse you so reasonable a gratification, my son?" was his reply.

Again Vinicius bent to kiss his hands, for he could not yet master his feelings. The Apostle laid his right hand upon the young man's head, and added:

"Go, and fear not Cæsar. In truth I say unto you that not a hair of your head shall fall to the ground."

Then he dispatched Miriam to fetch Lygia—telling her, as he did so, not to say who the visitor was.

The distance was short, and soon those present saw, through the myrtles of the little garden, Miriam leading Lygia by the hand.

Vinicius would have run to meet her, but the sight of that

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beloved form paralysed his strength with happiness, so that he remained motionless, his heart beating as though it would burst. He felt a hundred times more moved than he had done when for the first time he heard the whistling of the Parthians' arrows.

And now she was here—turning pale and red by turns, with surprise and alarm peeping from her questioning eyes! Yet she saw only looks of cheerfulness and affection. Peter approached her and said:

"Lygia, shall you *always* love him?"

For a moment there hung a silence. Her lips were trembling like those of a child which is about to weep and, guilty, is obliged to confess its fault.

"Reply," said the Apostle kindly.

Then, in a humble, timid voice, she murmured, as she fell at Peter's feet:

"Yes."

Already Vinicius was on his knees beside her. Peter laid his hands upon their two heads, saying:

"Love ye one another in Our Lord, and for His glory; for in your love there is no sin."

XII

IN the little garden Vinicius told Lygia all that he had just confessed to the Apostles. In words that came straight from the heart he revealed the mental anguish which he had undergone, and described both the change which had taken place in him and the sadness which had descended upon his life after he had quitted Miriam's dwelling. He had loved Lygia, he said, when he had seen her in the Aulus mansion, at the Palatine, and at Ostrianum. He had loved her when she had been watching by his bedside, and when she had left him. Since that time Chilo had discovered her retreat, and had advised him to seize her; but he had punished the Greek for his conduct, and decided to seek of the Apostles the Truth, and then to ask her hand in marriage. Blessed be the moment when such inspiration had come to him, for it had brought them together again, and she would flee him no more!

"Yet it was not *you* from whom I fled," said Lygia.

"From whom, then?"

She raised her pale-blue eyes to his. Then, lowering her head again, she replied:

"You *know* why I departed."

Half-stifled with excess of joy, Vinicius could not properly

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express all that he was feeling. Indeed, he himself scarcely understood it. Yet he knew that she had brought into his life a new beauty, and that she was no longer a statue, but a living soul. He told her—and this filled her cup of joy to the brim—that he had loved her most of all when she had fled, and that now, by the domestic hearth, he would for ever look upon her as a saint.

Silently he took her hand, while she looked fondly at him. Twice he repeated her name, as though to assure himself that he had really found her again, and was near her. Finally he asked her what her own mental experiences had been, and she confessed that even in the days of the Aulus mansion she had loved him, and that, had he restored her thither from the Palatine, she would have avowed her love outright, and tried to appease her parents' anger.

"I swear to you," said Vinicius, "that never was it I who conceived the idea of abducting you from your home. Some day Petronius shall tell you the story of how I confessed my love for you, as well as my desire to make you my wife. I said to him: 'Let her come and smear my threshold with wolf's fat, and take her place by my hearth'; but he only laughed at me, and then suggested to Cæsar the scheme of claiming you as a hostage, and thereafter making you over to myself. How many times, in my anguish, have I not cursed him! But perhaps it was all for the best, since otherwise I might never have known the Christians, nor come to understand you."

"Believe me, Marcus," replied Lygia, "it was Christ who brought you to me."

At the moment they were passing the ivy-covered arbour, and approaching the spot where Ursus, after strangling Croto, had thrown himself upon Vinicius.

"Here," said the latter, "I should, but for you, have been killed."

"Pray do not remind me of that!" was her reply. "Yet also do not cherish a grudge against Ursus."

"Could I ever wreak vengeance upon him for having protected *you*? Were he a slave, I should at once grant him his freedom."

"Had he been a slave, the Auluses would long ago have granted it him."

"Do you remember how I wished to restore you to the Auluses, but you said that, if I did so, Cæsar might come to hear of it, and revenge himself upon them? Well, *now* you can go and see them as often as ever you like. And when you have become mine I shall say to Cæsar, if at any time he should inquire of me what I have done with the hostage who was committed to my care: 'I have married her, and,

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with my consent, she visits the Auluses.' Cæsar will not remain long at Antium, for he is pining to be off to Achæa. Moreover, I am not bound to pay my respects to him every day. Consequently, as soon as ever Paul of Tarsus has instructed me in the faith, I intend to be baptised, and then to return to Rome, where I hope to regain the Auluses' friendship, seeing that some day or other they will be revisiting the city. Yes, all obstacles will then have been removed, and I shall be able to come and claim you, and to install you by my hearth. O my beloved, my beloved!"

Lygia raised her beaming eyes to his, and replied:

"Yes; and I shall say to you: Where thou goest I will go."

Halting under a cypress-tree near the entrance to the hut, Lygia leant against the trunk, while Vinicius said tremulously:

"I pray you, tell Ursus to go to the Aulus mansion, and to bring thence, to my own mansion, your childhood's toys and furniture."

Blushing like a rose or the dawn, she replied:

"Custom would bid us act otherwise, but—"

"Yes, I know; it is the custom for the pronuba¹ to carry the toys behind the bride. Yet pray do this for me. I will take them with me to my villa at Antium, and there they will be able to speak of you to me."

Clasping his hands, he said again:

"Do this for me, my beloved, my divinity; for Pomponia may soon be returning."

"Let Pomponia do what she pleases in the matter," replied Lygia, blushing more than ever at the thought of the pronuba.

Again they fell to silence, for love was choking the breath in their bosoms. As Lygia leant against the cypress her white figure stood out from the shadow like a flower. Her eyes were lowered, and her throat kept rising and falling. As for Vinicius, he too had turned pale, and his features were quivering. In the noontide stillness they could hear even the beating of their hearts, and their state of intoxication had transformed the cypress, the clump of myrtle, and the arbour into a garden of love.

Presently Miriam appeared in the doorway, and invited them to enter and share the repast. They did so, and seated themselves between the Apostles, who looked at them with rapture, as at the new generation which was destined to continue the sowing of the good seed of the doctrine.

Peter then blessed and broke bread, while on every face there lay a great peace, and all the room was filled with a happiness beyond measure.

¹ The matron who accompanied the Roman bride, and explained to her her wifely duties.

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"See now," said Paul as he turned to Vinicius, "whether or not we are the enemies of life and of joy."

And Vinicius replied:

"Never have I been happier than I am now among yourselves."

XIII

THE same evening, on his way home through the Forum, Vinicius saw Petronius' gilded litter being borne along the Vicus Tuscus by eight Bithynians. Stopping them with a gesture, he approached the curtains.

"I wish you the best of dreams!" he cried gaily at the sight of Petronius' drowsy form.

"So it is you!" exclaimed his uncle. "Yes, I had just dozed off, for I have been at the Palatine all night, and was on my way to buy something with which to amuse myself at Antium. What news is there?"

"You are making a round of the bookshops, are you not?" countered Vinicius.

"Yes; for I do not wish to upset my library. The word has it that both Musonius and Seneca have just published something fresh. Also, I am hunting for a Persius, as well as for an edition of the 'Eclogues' of Virgil which I do not happen to possess. How weary am I of it all, and how my hands ache with taking manuscripts out of their cylinders! The reason is that, once one has entered a bookshop, one wants to see all that it contains. I have been to Aviranus' establishment, to that of Atractus on the Argiletum, and to that of the Sosii in the Vicus Sandalarius. By Castor, how sleepy I am!"

"Since you have been at the Palatine, it is for *me* to ask news of *you*. Send your litter and your boxes of books home, and come with me to my house, where we will talk of Antium and of a certain other matter."

"Very well," said Petronius as he descended from the litter. "We leave for Antium the day after to-morrow, so you must get yourself ready. Neither peas in olive-oil nor a cloth wrapped round his fat neck have saved Ahenobarbus from growing hoarse; so he no longer dreams of putting off the journey, but is cursing both Rome and the air which he breathes in it. In fact, he would like to burn or to raze the city to the ground, so thirsty is he for the sea. Again and again he declares that the odours wafted by the wind from these narrow streets will one day bring him to the tomb. To-day he has had sacrifices offered in every temple in Rome on behalf of his voice; and woe betide Rome and,

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most of all, the Senate if that voice does not soon grow clearer!"

"Yes; for then he would no longer have a motive for going to Achæa." -

"You think, then, that our Cæsar really does possess unique talent? In the Olympic games he is going to appear as a poet (with his piece, 'The Burning of Troy'), as a charioteer, as a musician, as an athlete, and even as a dancer: and in each case he will carry off the garland. Why, should you suppose, is the monkey hoarse? For the reason that yesterday he tried to emulate our friend Paris in the scene with Leda, and, falling into a sweat with the exertion, caught cold. He was as wet and sticky as an eel freshly taken from the water. Every moment during the performance he kept changing his mask, and spinning around like a teetotum, and waving his arms about like a drunken sailor; until the sight of his huge paunch and pock-marked legs absolutely disgusted one. Though Paris had been schooling him for the last fifteen days, can you imagine Ahenobarbus figuring either as Leda or as the swan god? A fine swan for you! Something to talk about! But that is not enough. He wishes to appear in that pantomime *in public*—first of all at Antium, and then in Rome!"

"Already he has scandalised the public enough by singing in public: but to think that a Roman Cæsar should also tread the boards as an actor! No, Rome will never tolerate it."

"My good friend, Rome will tolerate anything, and the Senate will pass a vote of thanks to the 'Father of his Country.' The public is proud of having a buffoon for its ruler."

"Yes. Could one sink to lower depths than that?"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"You live at home now," he said, "and are for ever plunged in your meditations on the subject of Lygia or of the Christians. Consequently it is not surprising that you should stand in ignorance of what took place a few days ago, when Nero publicly married Pythagoras—he himself taking the part of the young bride! Surely that was the crowning folly of all, was it not? Nevertheless the priests attended, and the pair were solemnly united. I myself was present at the ceremony. I can tolerate many things, yet I found myself saying that at such a function the gods—if there are any—ought to have made *some* sign. Cæsar, for his part, does not believe in the gods; and certainly he has some reason for his scepticism."

"Then he combines in a single personality the qualities of archpriest, of deity, and of atheist?"

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"Exactly so," replied Petronius with a laugh. "What a trinity! What a world!"

"As is the world, so is Cæsar. But it will not last."

Thus conversing, the two friends arrived at Vinicius' house, and the host called gaily for the evening meal to be served.

"Yes, the world needs to be reformed, to be born anew," he continued.

"Yet it is not *we* who will accomplish that," replied Petronius; "if only for the reason that, under Ahenobarbus' rule, a man is like a butterfly—he lives but so long as the sunshine of the Imperial favour plays upon him, and, at the first breath of Imperial displeasure, perishes. By the son of Maia, but sometimes I ask myself how a fellow like Lucius Saturninus can have contrived to survive a Tiberius, a Caligula, and a Claudius. But no matter. Would you allow me to send your litter for Eunice? My inclination to sleep has passed away, and I should like to enjoy myself a little. Also, let us have a lute-player to enliven the meal, and thereafter we will talk about Antium. You, even more than myself, ought to give some thought to that matter."

Vinicius gave orders for Eunice to be sent for, but declared that he had no intention of incurring a headache over the journey to Antium.

"The world," he said, "is not limited to the Palatine—least of all for those who have something else in their minds and hearts."

Of this he delivered himself so negligently, and with such gaiety of manner, that Petronius looked at him, and said:

"What have you in your mind? You are behaving as you used to do in the days when you still wore a bulla round your neck."

"The reason of it is that I am happy," replied Vinicius; "and it was to tell you as much that I invited you home with me."

"What has happened?"

"Something which I would not exchange for all the Roman Empire."

He threw himself back in his chair, clasped his hands behind his head, and with a beaming face continued:

"Do you remember the day when we went to see Aulus Plautius? There you met, for the first time, a deity, in the shape of a young girl to whom you, of your own accord, gave the names of 'The Dawn' and 'The Spring.' Do you recollect that Psyche, that incomparably beautiful of virgins and goddesses?"

"What language are you speaking? Evidently you mean Lygia."

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"Yes; and I am her betrothed."

"Indeed?"

Before Petronius could say more Vinicius had leapt from his seat and summoned his steward.

"Call all the slaves hither," he commanded. "Every one without exception, and this instant."

"You are her betrothed?" repeated Petronius. Before he had had time to recover from his astonishment the huge atrium was swarming with slaves.

Vinicius turned to Demas, his head freedman.

"Those of you," he said, "who have served me for twenty years are to present yourselves before the Prætor to-morrow, in order to be accorded your freedom. Each of the remainder will receive three pieces of gold, and double rations for a week. Also, let orders be sent to the country penitentiaries that all punishments be remitted, and chains removed, and that such better food be given to the prisoners as may be found possible. This day is a day of happiness for me, and I wish joy to reign also in my house."

For a moment no one spoke. It was as though they could not believe their ears. Then every hand was raised as every mouth cried out:

"Oh, my lord, my lord!"

With a sign Vinicius dismissed his household; and although every member of it would have liked to have thanked him, and to have fallen at his feet, the company dispersed with an alacrity which filled the house, from basement to attic, with sounds of rejoicing.

"To-morrow," said Vinicius, "I intend to call them all together in the garden, and to bid each one of them trace on the sand his or her favourite sign. Those of them who shall trace a fish shall be freed by Lygia herself."

By this time Petronius, who was never astonished at anything for long, had recovered his insouciance.

"A fish?" he said. "Ah, now I remember what Chilo told us. It is the sign of the Christians."

Then he held out his hand to Vinicius.

"Happiness," continued he, "lies always where one seeks it. May Flora, for many years to come, strew your path with blossoms! I wish you all that you may be wishing for yourself."

"I thank you. I had thought you would blame me—even though you would have been wasting your time in doing so."

"I blame you? Not the least in the world. On the contrary, I say that you have done well."

"Ah, weathercock!" retorted Vinicius. "Have you forgotten what you said to me as we were leaving Pomponia's house?"

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"No; but I have changed my mind. In Rome, my dear friend, everything changes. Husbands change their wives, and wives their husbands. Why, then, should I not change my views? Nero came very near to marrying Acte on hearing that she was alleged to be of royal origin; in which case he would have had an honourable spouse, and we should have had a respect-worthy Augusta. By Proteus and his lonely haunts beneath the deep, but I intend to change my views on every occasion that I may think it convenient or feasible to do so. As for Lygia, her royal origin is at least more certain than is the history of Acte's ancient Trojans. Nevertheless, when at Antium, do you beware of Poppæa, for she is a vindictive woman."

"I shall not give her a thought. I tell you that at Antium not a hair will fall from my head."

"If you think to astonish me a second time, you are mistaken. Yet whence comes this certainty of yours?"

"From the Apostle Peter."

"Oh, it was the Apostle Peter who posted you in the matter? Well, it would be no use arguing against *that*. Yet allow me to take certain precautions, in case the Apostle Peter should prove to have been a false prophet. If he *were* to prove such, he would lose your confidence—which could not fail to be useful to him hereafter."

"Do what you will; but, for myself, I have faith in him, and you will find it useless to try and discourage me by making fun of his name."

"Yet another question: have you actually become a Christian?"

"No, not yet, but Paul of Tarsus is to accompany me to Antium for the purpose of explaining to me the doctrine of Christ; after which I shall receive baptism. I find that what you have told me as to the Christians being foes to life and to joy is not true."

"So much the better for you and for Lygia." Then Petronius added with a shrug of his shoulders and as though speaking to himself:

"The skill of these people in gaining converts is amazing! Moreover, how the sect is extending its ramifications!"

"Yes," said Vinicius, "there are thousands—tens of thousands—of Christians in Rome, as well as in other cities of Italy, Greece, and Asia. They are to be found in our legions and among the Prætorian Guards. A few dwell in Cæsar's palace itself. Slaves and citizens, rich and poor, the plebs and patricians—all profess, in equal numbers, the Christian doctrine. Are you aware that there are Christians in the Cornelius family, that Pomponia Græcina is a Christian, that Octavia appears to have been one also, and

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that Acte certainly is one? Yes, 'tis a religion which is embracing the universe; for it alone can renovate the world. Do not shrug your shoulders like that, for who knows whether, before a month or a year may have expired, you yourself will not have adopted Christianity?"

"I?" said Petronius. "No, by the son of Latona! Never shall I adopt it, however much it may include the sum-total of truth and of wisdom, human and divine. To do so would call for some exertion on my part; and to exert myself I feel by no means inclined. Nor do I feel disposed to give up anything whatever in life. You, with your ardent, buoyant nature, will always be able to wait upon circumstances; but what of myself? Have I not my precious stones, my cameos, my vases, and my Eunice? In Olympus also I disbelieve: I prefer, rather, to cling to earth, and to endeavour to prosper until the arrows of the divine archer shall have laid me low, or until Cæsar shall have sent me a command to open my veins. I have too great a weakness for violets and for a comfortable triclinium. Also, I have a certain affection for our gods, as rhetorical figures, as well as for Achæa—whither I am about to go with our fat, pock-marked-legged, incomparable, divine, period-compelling Cæsar Augustus Hercules Nero."

And he burst out laughing at the mere thought that he, Petronius, would ever adopt the doctrine of the Galilean fishermen. Under his breath he hummed:

"With verdant myrtles will I begarland my sword,
Even as Harmodius and Aristogiton have done."

Then he broke off, for the steward entered to announce Eunice.

Supper was served immediately; and after the lute-player had performed a few pieces of music Vinicius related to Petronius the story of Chilo's visit. When he had heard it out the elder man—who was again feeling an inclination to sleep—clasped his hands to his forehead, and said:

"The idea was good, since its object was good. As for Chilo, I should have given him five pieces of gold; but, since you ordered him to be flogged, you ought to have let him die under the lash, for the reason that no one knows whether, some day, the Senate may not be making obeisance to him, even as it is doing now to the knight of the awl, Vatinius. However, I bid you good-night."

Laying their garlands upon the table, Petronius and Eunice took their leave; after which Vinicius entered his library, and wrote to Lygia:

"I hope, divine one, that this letter will bid you good-day when you awake to-morrow. That is why, although

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I am to see you before many hours are past, I write it now. Cæsar is to leave for Antium in two days' time, and, alás! I have no choice but to accompany him. As I have told you, to disobey the command would be to risk my life; and I no longer have the courage to die. Yet, should you wish me to remain, you need but say the word, and I will do so: wherafter it will rest with Petronius to avert the threatened danger. To-day, which has been a day of joy for me, I have rewarded all my slaves; and to-morrow those of them who have served me for twenty years or more are to go before the Prætor, to be accorded their freedom. I know that this will meet with your approval, my beloved, since it conforms with the doctrine which you profess. In fact, it is for *your* sake that I have done it; and I shall tell the slaves that it is to *you* they owe their liberty, in order that they may glorify your name.

"For myself, on the contrary, I desire rather to become a slave—yes, the slave of happiness, and of you—and never to be accorded my freedom. A curse upon that Antium, and a curse upon Ahenobarbus' expeditions! Yet thrice fortunate am I in that I am not such a scholar as Petronius: for then I should have been forced also to go to Achæa. Nevertheless, the memory of you will sweeten for me the hours of separation. Every time that I am able to snatch a moment's leisure, I shall throw myself upon a horse and gallop back to Rome—there to delight my eyes with the sight of you, and my ears with the sound of your voice. And whenever I may be unable to come in person I shall send a slave with a letter for you, coupled with instructions to assure himself of your welfare.

"I greet you, my beloved, and throw myself at your feet. Do not be angry because I speak of you as a goddess. True, should you forbid me so to do, I will obey; but to-day I cannot speak otherwise. From the threshold of your future dwelling I salute you. With all my soul I send you a greeting."

XIV

It was known in Rome that Cæsar, in passing, would visit Ostia—or, rather, that he would inspect there the largest ship in the world, which had just come from Alexandria with a cargo of grain. Thence, by way of the Via Littoralis, he would proceed onwards to Antium. Orders to that end were issued some days in advance; while, in addition, public curiosity early brought a large number of the Roman populace to Ostia—a populace which included samples of every nation in the world.

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Cæsar was accustomed to take with him, when travelling, every one of the objects among which he loved to spend his days. No matter how brief a halt he might make, at once he had his familiar environment of statues and mosaics installed. Also, on these journeys he was accompanied by a regular army of servitors, in addition to whole battalions of Prætorian Guards, of favourite Augustans, and of their retinues.

Early on the morning of the appointed day herdsmen from the Campania arrived at Antium with five hundred she-asses, in order that, on the morrow, Poppæa should be able to take her daily bath in their milk. The populace rejoiced to see the waving of a thousand ears amid the whirling dust, and to hear the cracking of whips and the wild cries of the drovers.

After the asses had gone by a band of young serving-men spread themselves along the route, in order to sweep it, and to strew the roadway with flowers and pine-needles. As the morning wore on the crowd thickened. Some had brought with them their entire families, and, disposing their viands on the stones destined for the new temple of Ceres, betook themselves to eating and drinking. Others gathered together in knots, and started to hold forth on the subject of the Emperor's departure, of his coming voyage, and of his travels in general. This led some of the sailors and military veterans to begin talking of the marvels of countries which they had heard of when on their foreign campaigns, but which no Roman foot had yet trodden; while citizens who had never strayed further than the Appian Way gaped in amazement at these fabulous tales of India and of Arabia, of the island in the Archipelago of Britain where Briareus bound the sleeping Saturn in chains, of the countries of the Far North, of frozen seas, and of the manner in which the waters of the ocean roar when the sun has plunged below them. Also, tales were current that the famous ship of Ostia had brought grain sufficient to last for two years, without counting some four hundred passengers and fierce wild beasts which were destined to figure in the Circus at the summer games. All this stimulated enthusiasm for the Cæsar who not only fed his people, but also amused them.

Next there passed the Numidian horsemen of the Prætorian Cohort, with their swarthy faces gleaming in the reflection of their gilded cuirasses, and the points of their spears glittering like sparks of fire. This contingent formed the head of the procession.

Next there came vehicles loaded with purple, red, and violet pavilions, as well as with pavilions that were woven of byssus as white as snow. Oriental carpets also there

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were, tablets of citrus-wood, fragments of mosaics, kitchen apparatus, cages filled with birds from north, east, and west (the tongues or brains of these were destined to form dishes for Cæsar's table), vessels of wine, and baskets of fruit. Objects liable to be bruised or broken were carried by slaves; whence there were to be seen long files of porters laden with jars and statues of Corinthian bronze. Some of these porters were specially told off to convey Etruscan vases, others Grecian, and yet others gold or silver vessels, or pieces of Alexandrian glass. All were escorted by detachments of Prætorian infantry or cavalry, while, in addition, each band of slaves was directed by an overseer, who wielded a whip weighted with iron or lead. The importance and attention bestowed by the several bearers upon their loads caused the cortege to resemble, rather, a solemn religious procession; and this resemblance grew the more striking as soon as the musical instruments of Cæsar and his Court came by—a set of instruments which included harps, Grecian lutes, Hebrew and Egyptian stringed instruments, lyres, formingæ, citharæ, flutes, long buffalo horns, and cymbals. While looking at that bevy of instruments, with their decorations of bronze, of gold, and of precious stones sparkling in the sunlight, it might have been thought that Bacchus and Apollo were jointly setting forth to tour the world!

Next behind the instruments came ornate chariots, freighted with artistic groups of male and female acrobats and dancers—all of them holding wands in their hands. These, again, were followed by slaves intended, not for service, but for excess—little slave boys and girls who had been selected from Greece and Asia Minor for their beauty. Some of these infants, with their long hair confined under golden nets, almost resembled Cupid, but had their marvelously beautiful features thickly coated with cosmetics, lest the winds of the Campania should tan their delicate complexions.

Proud of a strength which they could have turned even against Cæsar himself, next there came a mixed force of Prætorian Guards and white Sicambrians—hirsute, blue-eyed, and heavy-footed. In front of them were borne the Roman eagles (entrusted to bearers known as "imaginarii"), inscribed tablets, statues of Roman and German deities, and statues and busts of Cæsar. From under the pelts and armour worn by these warriors gleamed limbs both sun-burnt and gigantic, like military engines capable of wielding the ponderous weapons with which such guardsmen were furnished. Indeed, the very earth seemed to sway beneath their stately, measured tread; and though, originally, many

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of them had reached Rome in manacles, they now gazed with contempt at the rabble which filled the streets. Yet the number of these warriors was not large, since the bulk of the Prætorian force had remained in camp to guard the city, and to hold it in check. Next came Nero's chained lions and tigers, ready to be attached to his chariot if at any moment he should be seized with a desire to emulate Dionysus. Held by Arab and Hindoo keepers, the steel chains with which the beasts were bound were so entwined with garlands that they resembled, rather, festoons of flowers. All had been trained by skilled trainers, and so seemed to look sleepily at the crowd out of their green eyes; yet at intervals one or another of them would raise its gigantic head, and inhale, through wheezing nostrils, the odour of the multitude while it licked its jaws with its spiny tongue.

Lastly there came the Imperial vehicles and litters, a detachment of Prætorian Guards (composed exclusively of Italian volunteers), a mob of splendidly dressed slaves and young men, and Cæsar himself.

The crowd of onlookers included the Apostle Peter, who had desired to get a sight of the Emperor; and with the Apostle were Lygia—her face heavily veiled—and Ursus, whose strength constituted a source of protection to the young girl which nothing could assail. Taking up a block of stone which was destined for the construction of the new temple, the Lygian carried it to Peter, for him to stand upon and so obtain a better view of the procession. At first the crowd murmured when Ursus parted the waves of humanity as a ship parts the waves of the sea; but when, unassisted, he lifted aloft a block of stone which four of the strongest men could not possibly have moved, the people burst into applause.

Cæsar was riding in an open chariot, drawn by six Idumean stallions, and containing no other occupant save a couple of monstrous dwarfs. His clothing consisted of a white tunic under an amethyst-coloured toga; the latter of which garments cast a bluish tinge over his face. Since his departure from Neapolis his person had grown notably stouter, and a double chin had so increased the size of his jowl that his lips, already in too close proximity to his nose, seemed now to open under his very nostrils. Also, his enormous neck was swathed in a scarf which, at intervals, he kept readjusting with a fat hand—a hand on which a quantity of red hair had formed from the wrist downwards, in clusters of spots like a sprinkling of blood. Yet never had he dared to have these scraped, since he had been told that, should that be done, it would bring on a trembling of the

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fingers which would prevent him from playing the lute. His face was stamped with boundless vanity, as also with weariness and lack of energy. Yet his general appearance, though grotesque, was very terrible.

True, some of the populace cried out, "Hail, divine Cæsar! Hail, incomparable Apollo and son of Apollo!" and at such times Nero smiled: but others among the crowd there were who, unaware of the prophecy contained in their jest, broke the unanimity of the applause by shouting, "Bronzebeard, Bronzebeard, are you afraid of setting Rome on fire with your flaming beard?" Nevertheless Cæsar was not greatly irritated by these voices, since he had offered his beard to Jupiter Capitolinus, and no longer wore it. Unfortunately yet other individuals, concealed behind piles of stone or the courses of the temple, shouted, "Matricide! Orestes! Alcæon!" or "Where is Octavia? Surrender your mantle of purple!" Poppæa, who was following in Nero's wake, was greeted by the mob as "Yellow Hair"—the name usually given to a street prostitute; and when Nero's keen ear caught insults of this kind he would raise his emerald monocle to his eyes, as though seeking to detect and to make a note of the culprits.

Such was the spectacle which greeted the Apostle's gaze. The looks of the two men crossed each other; and for a single fleeting moment the one master of the world faced the other—namely, the master who was to disappear like a vision of blood and the master—an old man clad in a rude woollen coat—who, for centuries upon centuries, was to have possession of the world at large, and of that city in particular.

But Cæsar had now passed on his way. Immediately behind him came eight Africans, bearing a magnificent litter in which was seated Poppæa—the Poppæa detested of the people, a woman clad, like her lord, in amethyst, with a face painted, motionless, and overcast with thought. In her wake there marched her separate Court of both sexes, as well as a line of chariots conveying her wardrobe and toilet apparatus.

The sun had long passed the meridian when the passage of Cæsar's intimates—the progress of the Augustans in a cortège that resembled a snake unfolding its glittering coils—began. The crowd smiled good-naturedly as Petronius went by, seated in his litter with his favourite slave; while, for his part, Tigellinus preferred to stand erect on a chariot, in order that, by stretching his neck at intervals, he might see if Cæsar required his presence. Licinius Piso the mob saluted with applause, while Vitellius it received with laughter, and Vatinius with catcalls. Towards the Consuls,

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Licinius and Lecanius, it showed itself indifferent; but Tullius Senecio, who, for some obscure reason, was liked, met with a good reception, as also did Vestinus. The Court, on this occasion, was very numerous, and included even Comitus Afer and the decrepit Lucius Saturninus. Vespasian and his son also were in evidence, and young Nerva and Lucan, and Annius Gallo and Quintianus, as well as a quantity of women who had won notoriety for magnificence or for their dissolute morals. Even the rays of the sun seemed to have been absorbed into the splendour of the cavalcade. True, among the crowd was many a poor fellow with a pinched stomach; yet even upon these *misérables* the pageant exercised no other effect than to excite their covetousness, and to fill them with a feeling of pride in the strength and invulnerability of Rome, the mistress of the universe.

Vinicius was riding at the tail-end of the procession. On catching sight of Lygia and the Apostle, whom he had not been expecting to meet, he leapt from his chariot.

"So you are come, my Lygia!" he exclaimed. "I hardly know how to thank you. God could not have sent me a better omen. May He bestow upon you His blessing. Now I must bid you farewell, but only for a short time. As we journey I am going to post relays of Parthian horses, so that, until we return, I may be able to spend every day of leisure with you. Good-bye until we meet again."

"Until we meet again, Marcus," re-echoed Lygia. "May Christ go with you, and open your soul to the teachings of Paul!"

"My beloved, may all come to pass as you say! Paul has chosen to proceed on foot among my attendants, but he is here, nevertheless, and is to be my master and my companion. Now raise your veil for a moment, my beloved, so that I may view your sweet face once more before my departure. Why have you so disguised yourself?"

Throwing back her veil, and showing her radiant countenance and beautiful eyes, she asked him:

"Am I sufficiently fair?"

And in her smile there was something of the lightheartedness of a young girl. Vinicius gazed at her with rapture, and replied:

"Yes; so fair that my eyes desire to see no other sight until I die!" Then, to the amazement of the populace, the illustrious Augustan was seen pressing his lips to the hands of a humble maiden.

"Good-bye!"

The next moment he was gone, for the Imperial escort was now a long way ahead. With an almost imperceptible

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sign of the cross the Apostle Peter followed the young man with his blessing.

Presently the couple were approached by Demas, the miller in whose factory Ursus was working. Kissing the Apostle's hand, he begged him and his companion to come home with him—adding that his house was situated close to the Emporium.

At nightfall, when they had had some rest and refreshment with Demas, the pair set out for the Trans-Tiberian quarter; and since they wished to cross the river by the Pontus Æmilianus, they proceeded *viâ* the Clivus Publicus, which bisected the Aventine Hill between the temple of Diana and the temple of Mercury. From that elevation the Apostle gazed at the neighbouring buildings and others in the remoter distance. He was thinking of the immensity and the might of the city where he had been preaching the Word of God. Though he had seen the Roman legions in the various countries which he had traversed, they had figured there but as scattered constituents of the force which, for the first time that day, he had seemed to see personified in the aspect of Cæsar. This city, vicious to the core, yet immovable; this Cæsar, the assassin of his own brother, mother, and wife, the man behind whom there glided always an escort of spectres as numerous as his Court; this libertine and buffoon, the master of thirty legions, and, through them, of the universe; these courtiers, clad in gold and scarlet robes, uncertain ever of the morrow, yet more powerful even than kings,—all this appeared to the Apostle to be the setting of the infernal realm of iniquity. His simple heart stood aghast at the thought that God should have entrusted the earth to this monster, that he might mould and overturn and trample upon it as he crushed it with blood and tears.

"O Master," exclaimed Peter in spirit, "what am I to do in face of this city to which Thou hast sent me? To it do belong both the seas and the continents. To it do belong both the beasts of the earth and the creatures which dwell in the waters. To it do belong all other kingdoms and cities. Thirty legions hedge it about. And I, O Master—I am but a fisherman from the shores of the Lake. What can I do? How am I to overcome evil?"

His unspoken prayer was interrupted by Lygia.

"One would think that the city was on fire!" she said.

And, truly enough, the sunset was an extraordinary one.

From the spot where Lygia and the Apostle were standing an extensive view could be obtained. Towards the right they could see the Circus Maximus, with, above it, the palaces of the Palatine in tiers, and, facing them

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beyond the Forum Boarium and the Velabrum, the summit of the Capitol and the temple of Jupiter. Of every temple the walls, the columns, and the crest seemed to be sunken in a gleam of purple and gold, while such of the river's course as was visible from that distance seemed to be flowing a torrent of blood. Gradually, as the sun sank lower and lower behind the hill, the gleam grew redder, and more and more like a conflagration; until, widening and ever widening, it had come to embrace the remaining hills of Rome, and to cover the whole of the surrounding region.

"Yes, one would think that the city was on fire!" repeated Lygia.

Peter shaded his eyes with his hand, and replied:

"Verily the wrath of God lies heavy upon it!"

XV

VINICIUS to LYGIA:

"The slave Phlegonius by whom I am sending this letter is a Christian, and therefore one of those who are to receive their freedom at your hands, my beloved. He is an old family servant, and I can use him as a messenger with all confidence. I am dispatching the letter from Laurentum, where we have had to call a halt because of the heat. It is here that Otho used to possess a splendid villa, which he gave to Poppæa; and though she has since been divorced from him, she thought it convenient, when that came about, to retain Otho's present. When I think of the women who surround me at Court and of *you*, it seems to me that the stones which Deucalion hurled must have engendered more than one species of humanity, and that you belong to the species which was born of crystal. I love and admire you with my whole soul; wherefore, lest I go on speaking only of you, I must hasten to attempt an account of our journey.

"Cæsar, as I say, has been Poppæa's guest at her villa; and for him she had secretly prepared a magnificent reception. Though few of the Augustans were invited, Petronius and myself were included in that few. After the banquet we sailed in gilded boats over a sea that was as blue as your eyes, my divinity; and we rowed ourselves, for evidently it flattered Poppæa to be served by persons of consular rank, or by their sons. Meanwhile Cæsar, clad in purple, sat at the helm of the Imperial barge, and sang to the sea a hymn which he had composed the previous night, in collaboration with Diodorus. Also, on the boats which made up the procession there were stationed Indian slaves, skilled in extracting music from marine shells; while

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around us plunged dolphins who purported to have been drawn from Amphitrite's caves to listen to the music. I—well, what do you suppose *I* was doing? I was thinking of you, and sighing for you, and yearning to take that sea and that azure prospect and that music, and to give them all to you. Tell me, my Augusta, would you like some day to go and live by the sea, far, far away from Rome? In Sicily I own an estate, and on that estate there is a grove of almond trees which, in spring, becomes covered over with pink blossom, and grows so near to the water's edge that its boughs almost sweep the surface. There I will make love to you, and there I will practise the doctrine which Paul is about to teach me. Already I know that it in no way forbids love or happiness. Shall you be willing to do as I suggest? Yet before you reply with your sweet lips I must hasten to continue the story of what took place on the Imperial barge.

"When we had travelled some distance from the shore we sighted a sail; and at once we began to discuss the question of whether it was a fisherman's boat or a ship from Ostia. For myself, I guessed the former; whereupon Poppæa declared that nothing escaped my eyes, and, covering her face with her veil, inquired if I could recognise her in that guise. Before I could reply Petronius remarked that a passing cloud could render even the sun invisible; but Poppæa, though feigning to be amused, retorted that only love could blind such piercing eyesight as mine. Then she set herself to question me concerning different ladies of the Court, in the hope of discovering with whom it is that I am in love; but I answered her calmly. At length she mentioned *your* name, while at the same moment she uncovered her face, and disclosed her malicious, inquisitive eyes. To Petronius I shall ever feel grateful in that he seized the occasion to set the boat rocking, and so diverted from me the general attention; for, had there come to my ears a single malevolent or ironical word concerning you, I should have found it difficult to have refrained from bringing down my oar upon the head of that detestable woman. You remember, do you not, how I told you of my previous encounter with her near the lake of Agrippa?

"Petronius is feeling very nervous on my account, and has again been urging me not to offend Augusta's vanity; but he no longer understands me, nor is aware that, apart from you, I see no pleasure, beauty, or love anywhere. Also, he does not understand that Poppæa inspires me with nothing but contempt and disgust. The truth is that you have transformed my soul—so much so that I could never

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resume my former mode of life. Yet do not be afraid of anything untoward happening to me here. Poppæa does not love me; she is incapable of loving any one, and her whims owe their origin merely to her resentment against Cæsar, who is still subject to her influence, but can no longer manage her, and does not scruple to flaunt his infidelity.

"Another circumstance which ought to reassure you is the fact that Peter told me not to fear Cæsar, since not a hair of my head should fall at Antium. And I believe him, since a voice within me keeps repeating that every one of his words will be accomplished, and that, since he has blessed our love, neither Cæsar nor all the powers of Hades nor Fate itself will be able to separate us. The thought makes me feel as happy as though I were in that Heaven where alone there reigns perfect rest and joy. But perhaps what I say concerning Heaven and Fate has offended against your Christian sentiments? In that case pardon me, for my sin was involuntary. Baptism has not yet purified my soul, and my heart is like an empty vessel into which Paul of Tarsus is about to pour a faith which is the more alluring because it is also yours.

"Yes, at Antium I shall pass my days and nights in listening to Paul, who, since we started upon our journey, has acquired so great an influence among my retinue that they refuse to leave his side. In him they see not only a worker of miracles, but also a wellnigh superhuman being. Yesterday I read joy in his face; and when I asked him what he had been doing, he replied: 'I have been sowing the good seed.' Petronius knows that Paul is with me, and is anxious to see him, as also is Seneca, who has heard speak of him through Gallo. But already the stars are growing pale, my Lygia, and the morning star is waxing brighter and brighter. Soon the dawn will be tingeing the waves of the sea to red. Every one around me is sleeping. Only I am watching. I think of you, I love you, and I send you my greeting at the same moment that I am greeting the dawn. Ah, my beloved, my betrothed!"

XVI

VINICIUS to LYGIA:

"My beloved, have you ever visited Antium with the Aulus family? If not, it will be a pleasure to me to show you the town. From Laurentum onwards the coast is studded with villas, and Antium itself is one long succession of palaces and façades. My own dwelling lies close to the

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sea, and is backed by a grove of olive-trees and cypresses. Each time that I remind myself that it will one day be yours also, its marbles seem to glow whiter, its gardens to appear more fresh, and the sea to look more blue. Oh, Lygia, how good it is to be alive and to love! Old Menicles, my steward, has planted, in the grass under the myrtles, a number of iris-clumps; and whenever my eye falls upon them I think of the Aulus mansion, of its impluvium, of the garden where once I sat by your side. You too those irises will remind of your youthful home: and that is why I feel certain that you will like Antium and this villa.

"Since our arrival Paul and I have had a long talk over our meal. First we spoke of you, and then he began to give me instruction in the faith; and even were I able to write like Petronius, I could never express to you all that my mind then thought, or all that my soul then experienced!

"Tell me how it is possible that the world can contain, at one and the same time, such men as the Apostle Peter, Paul of Tarsus, and Cæsar? I ask you because, after hearing Paul's teaching, I spent the remainder of the evening in Nero's palace. First of all he read to us his poem on the burning of Troy, and lamented the fact that he had never yet seen a city on fire. Evidently he envied Priam. Tigellinus replied: 'Speak but the word, and, taking a torch, I will see to it that before dawn you behold Antium in flames.' Cæsar, however, treated the fellow as a fool. 'Should you do that,' he said, 'where could I go to breathe the air of the sea, or to tend this voice which the gods have given me for the happiness of a suppliant people? Is it not Rome, rather, that proves hurtful to me? Is it not the stifling odours of the Suburra and the Esquiline that render me hoarse? Moreover, could Antium in flames afford as tragic and splendid a spectacle as would Rome on fire?' Every one except myself went into ecstasies at this utterance. Next he declared that his poem on Troy would throw those of Homer into the shade; after which he amused himself by saying what a marvellous city, when Rome had been reconstructed, he would be able to exhibit for the admiration of future ages. Thereupon his drunken guests cried out, 'Do it, do it, O Cæsar!' but he replied, 'To that end I should need friends more faithful and more devoted than you are.' I declare that at first I felt uneasy when I heard these proposals, for *you* are in Rome, my adored one: but now I laugh at that uneasiness, since, fools though they be, Cæsar and his Augustans would never commit such a folly. Yet see how ready one is to tremble for what one loves! Indeed, I wish that Linus' house were not situated in so narrow a street. For that matter, the

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mansions of the Palatine would be equally unworthy of you—though it is one of my most earnest desires that you should have every elegance and comfort to which you have been accustomed. For this reason pray return to Aulus' mansion, my Lygia. Were Cæsar likely to come back to Rome, his slaves would soon bring him news of your removal; but, as it is, he is going to make a long stay at Antium, and when he *does* return people will altogether have ceased to talk about the Lygian Princess. Also, Linus and Ursus could remain with you, even as now. Moreover, I have hopes that before Rome has again seen Cæsar you will be dwelling in your own mansion near the Carinæ. Blessed be the day, the hour, the minute when you first pass my threshold! And should the Christ whom I am learning to know grant me such a boon, blessed be His name also! Yes, I am going to serve Him, and to be ready to lay down my life for His sake. Even though I be expressing myself badly, you and I will serve Him until the thread of our days be severed.

"I love you, and I greet you with my whole soul!"

XVII

URSUS was drawing water from the well, and as he let down the double amphora, attached to a long cord, he was singing, in an undertone, a Lygian ditty. His eyes, radiant with joy, were fixed upon the outlines of Lygia and Vinicius, who were seated under the cypresses in Linus' garden. In the calm of the evening, while the sky was slowly turning to gold and lilies, the pair were conversing, hand in hand.

"Are you sure that no harm will befall you for having left Antium without Cæsar's knowledge?" said Lygia.

"Yes, my beloved," was Vinicius' reply. "Cæsar has announced that for the next two days he is going to remain in retirement with Terpnos, in order to compose some new songs. Besides, what does Cæsar matter when I am near *you*, and can look at *you*, my adored one, my darling?"

"Ah, I knew that you would come! Twice Ursus, by my desire, has been to the Carinæ for news of you, although Linus laughed at me, and so did Ursus."

True enough, it was clear that she had been expecting her lover, for, instead of the dark robe which she usually wore, she had donned a white one of some delicate material whence her shoulders and head peeped forth like a primrose from under the snow. Only a few pink anemones adorned her hair.

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Vinicius pressed his lips to his beloved one's hand, and they seated themselves upon a stone bench among some flowering hawthorn.

"How still it is here, and how beautiful the world!" said Vinicius in a low voice. "I feel happy as never I have felt in my life before. Tell me, Lygia; why is that? Never should I have supposed that there existed a love like ours. I used to think that love was but a fever in the veins, a furious desire; whereas now I see that one can love with every drop of one's blood, and with every breath that one draws, yet at the same time feel a great, sweet restfulness, as though one had been lulled to slumber, and had found complete peace in death. Indeed, it is only now that I have learnt why you and Pomponia Græcina used to appear so free from trouble. This happiness is the gift of Christ."

She laid her gracious countenance upon the young man's shoulder.

"My beloved Marcus!" she murmured. More she could not say, for joy, gratitude, and the certainty that she had the right to love him filled her eyes with tears. Vinicius pressed her closer to himself.

"Lygia," he said, "blessed be the moment when first I heard His name!"

And she replied in a low voice:

"Marcus, I love you!"

For a moment they remained silent, while the garden began to grow silver under the beams of the rising moon. At length Vinicius spoke again.

"I know it," he said. "Scarcely had I entered your house to-day, scarcely had I kissed your dear hands, before I read in your eyes the question: 'Are you yet filled with the divine doctrine which I profess? Have you yet been baptised?' No, I have not been baptised, my beloved, and the reason is that Paul said to me: 'Although I have convinced you that God came to earth, and suffered Himself to be crucified for the salvation of mankind, it is for Peter to purify you in the source of grace, for it was he who first blessed you.' Moreover, my beloved, I am anxious that you should assist at my baptism, and that Pomponia should be my godmother. That is why I have not been baptised, although I believe in our Saviour, and in His comforting doctrine. How should I not believe that Christ came on earth when I am told that He did so by Peter, who has been His disciple, and by Paul, to whom He has appeared? How, too, should I not believe that He was God, seeing that He rose again from the dead? He was beheld of men in the city, on the Lake, and at His Ascension; and those who beheld Him were men whose

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lips could never lie. I have believed in these things since the day when I heard Peter at Ostrianum. Yet at first I was afraid of your doctrine, for I thought that it would separate you from me, and that it comprised neither wisdom nor beauty nor happiness; but now that I have learnt its meaning, what sort of a man should I be if I did not desire to see truth reign on earth in place of falsehood, love in place of hatred, goodness in place of evil, fidelity in place of treason, charity in place of vengeance? Others there are who wish for justice, but your doctrine alone can render the human heart just. Also, it renders the human heart pure and faithful, even as are the hearts of Pomponia and of yourself; and if the divine Christ has, in addition, promised us eternal life and infinite happiness, what more could we desire? If I were to inquire of Seneca why he recommends virtue when frowardness would be more productive of pleasure, he could give me no reasonable answer. But I know why I ought to be virtuous. It is because goodness and love flow from Christ; and when death shall have closed my eyes I shall again find life, I shall again find happiness, I shall again find myself, I shall again find you, my beloved. And that this doctrine is divine, and that it is the best of all doctrines, both my reason tells me and my heart feels by instinct. Who could resist those two forces?"

Lygia had listened with her blue eyes fixed upon him—a pair of eyes that, in the moonlight, looked like mystic, dew-bespangled flowers.

"Yes, Marcus, all that is true," she said as she pressed her head yet closer to his shoulder.

The immensity of their happiness was now complete, for they now understood that they were bound together by a force even greater than love, yet a force which is at once so gentle and so tenacious that, through its action, love itself becomes an imperishable thing.

After a brief silence Vinicius resumed in a voice that sounded hoarse and tremulous:

"You shall be the soul of my soul, and the most precious of all beings to me. Our hearts shall beat in unison. O my beloved, to think that we shall live together, that we shall adore the gentle Saviour together, that it is known to both of us that after death, as after a happy dream, our eyes will open to a new light! Say the word, and we will leave Rome to take up our abode far, far from its walls."

And, with her head resting upon the shoulder of her betrothed, she replied:

"Yes, Marcus. You have spoken to me of Sicily. It was in Sicily that the Auluses desired to spend their old age."

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"Yes, dearest; our estates adjoin one another. There is a marvellous Sicilian seaboard of which the climate is gentler, and the nights even more restful, than is the case in Rome. There life and happiness are one."

Both remained silent as they contemplated the future. Closer and closer did he clasp her to his breast. In that quarter of the city, where there lived only a poor working population, every one else had retired to rest.

"And shall I be able to see Pomponia?" Lygia asked.

"Yes, my beloved. We will invite her to visit us at our villa, as well as go to visit her at hers. And would you like the Apostle Peter to accompany us? He is broken now with age and fatigue. Paul also shall come to visit us. He shall convert Aulus Plautius to Christianity, and, like the Roman soldiers, we will found a whole colony—but a colony of Christians."

"I love you!" was all that Lygia could say.

Again he pressed his lips to the young girl's hand, and for a moment nothing was to be heard but the beating of their hearts. Not a breath of air was stirring, and the cypress-trees stood motionless in the stillness.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a deep rumbling which seemed to come from the bowels of the earth. Lygia shuddered.

"It is the lions roaring in the vivaria," said Vinicius.

For a while he and Lygia stood listening. To the first roar there replied a second, and then a third, until fully a score could be heard resounding. Now and then there would be several thousand lions caged in the several menageries of the arenæ, and frequently, by night, they would come and thrust sad muzzles through the bars, and, as now, when they thought of the desert and of liberty, fill the silent night with roars that re-echoed throughout the length and breadth of the city. As Lygia listened to the sound her heart suddenly contracted with a sort of unreasoning terror.

Vinicius placed his arms around her.

"Do not be afraid, my beloved," he said. "The circus games are going to be held soon, and that is why the vivaria are so full."

As the couple re-entered Linus' little house the roarings of the beasts were growing louder and louder.

XVIII

At Antium Petronius won almost daily victories over the Augustans who were intriguing for Cæsar's favour. At Rome, when it was necessary to suppress apparently

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dangerous persons, to despoil their goods, to carry through affairs of politics, to engineer pageants, or to satisfy Cæsar's monstrous whims, Tigellinus was indispensable; but at Antium Cæsar lived the life of the Hellenes. From morning till night he was busy with the reciting of verses, with discussions on the making of them, with music, with the theatre, and with everything that Greek genius had devised for the embellishment of existence. Under such conditions, Petronius, who was not only immeasurably better educated than Tigellinus and the other Augustans, but also a man of intellect, eloquence, and subtle thought, was bound to carry the day. Cæsar sought his company, consulted his opinion, asked his advice, and showed him lively goodwill. The whole Court imagined that henceforth Petronius' star would remain definitely in the ascendant. Those who had been treating the elegant Epicurean with coldness now began to associate with him again, and to pay him their addresses. Indeed, more than one such person was sincerely delighted to see Nero's favour bestowed upon a man who, even if he received the flattery of his late enemies with an ironical smile, was at least too indolent or too fastidious to be revengeful, or to use his power to crush his fellows. There were times when he could have brought about the downfall even of Tigellinus, but he preferred merely to indulge in persiflage at his expense, and to expose his ignorance and vulgarity. The Senate of Rome breathed again, for a month and a half had passed since last a sentence of death had been issued. Both at Antium and in Rome stories were current of the refinement to which the debaucheries of Cæsar and his favourite had been brought; but every man preferred to feel that he was under the sway of a refined monarch rather than under that of the bestial monarch who was pandered to by Tigellinus.

Petronius, with his habitual carelessness, appeared to pay no heed to his position, but still remained aloof and sceptical. Frequently he seemed to his associates to be laughing at them, at Cæsar, and at the whole universe; while at other times he dared even to criticise Nero to his face, and, just when he appeared to be lost, to season his criticism in such a manner that it redounded to his own advantage, and rehabilitated his fortunes.

Cæsar was reading to his familiars a fragment of his "Troiad." When he had finished, and the cries of enthusiasm had ceased, Petronius, receiving a questioning glance, remarked:

"They would do to throw into the fire, those verses."

Those who had heard the words stood petrified, and every man felt his heart contract with fear. Indeed, never from

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any mouth had Nero heard such a judgment come. Tigellinus looked radiant, but Vinicius turned pale, in the belief that, though Petronius never got drunk, he had, on this occasion, at least exceeded.

In honeyed accents, which nevertheless vibrated with the wrath of a vain man who has been insulted, Nero said:

"What do you find *bad* in them?"

"Do not," replied Petronius with a gesture towards the bystanders, "believe those fellows. They understand nothing. You ask me what I find bad in your verses. It is this, if you wish to hear the truth. They would be good for Virgil, they would be good for Ovid, they would be good even for Homer; but they are not good enough for you. You ought never to have written them. The conflagration which you depict therein does not flame enough; your fire does not burn at sufficient heat. Do not listen to Lucan's flatteries. Had *he* written the verses I should have hailed him as a genius; but not you, Cæsar, for you are greater than such poets as he. One has the right to demand more of a being upon whom the gods have bestowed *everything*. You give way too much to indolence. You take a siesta after your dinner when you ought to be working steadily. Consequently, to you who could beget a work before which everything else would sink into eclipse I say outright: compose better verses than these."

All this was said as though Petronius attached no importance to his words. In the same breath he seemed to be rallying and to be correcting Cæsar. Yet Nero's eyes were wet with joy.

"True, the gods have given me *some* talent," he said; "but they have given me more than that—they have given me a true expert in poetry, and a friend who alone knows how to tell one the truth to one's face."

With these words Cæsar extended his red, hairy hand towards a golden candelabrum which had formed part of the spoil of Delphi, with the intention of burning his manuscript; but before the flame could touch the papyrus Petronius had stopped him.

"No, no!" said the courtier. "Even though unworthy of you, those verses belong to humanity. Pray let me have them."

"Nay; rather let me send them to you in a casket of my own designing," replied Cæsar as he pressed Petronius to his bosom. Then he added:

"Yes, you are right. My Troy *does* flame with too timid a burning. I had thought that, provided I could equal Homer, I should have done sufficient. Always I have been deterred by a certain nervousness. However, you have now

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opened my eyes. And do you know whence the fault with which you have reproached me arises? A sculptor, when he wishes to create the statue of a god, seeks for and finds a model; but I have never had such a model—I have never seen a city in flames."

"In that case it has required a great artist merely to envisage the scene as you have envisaged it."

Nero reflected for a moment; then said:

"Answer me a question, Petronius. Do you regret the burning of Troy?"

"I regret it? By the bandy-legged spouse of Venus, no! Troy would never have been burnt had not Prometheus made a present of fire to humanity, and the Greeks declared war against Priam. On the other hand, had fire never existed, Æschylus would never have written his 'Prometheus,' and, had war not broken out, Homer would never have written his 'Iliad,'—and I set more store upon a 'Prometheus' and an 'Iliad' than I do upon the existence of a little town which was probably sordid and dirty, and where, at best, there would be reigning at the present day some damnable viceroy who was wearied to death with the local council and its complaints."

"That is speaking with sound reason," said Cæsar. "To poetry and to art it is both one's duty and one's right to sacrifice everything. Happy were the Achæans who furnished Homer with the subject of the 'Iliad'! And happy was Priam who witnessed the ruin of his country! But I—I have never seen a city burning!"

For a while there was a silence which Tigellinus broke with the words:

"I have already said to you, Cæsar, that, should you so ordain, I will burn Antium. Or, if the loss of all these villas and palaces should cause you regret, I will fire the ships at Ostia, or have constructed on the Alban Hills a city of wood to which you yourself shall apply the first torch. Is such your will?"

Nero threw at the speaker a glance of deep contempt.

"Think you," he said, "that I wish to contemplate wooden booths in flames? Your brain has become barren, Tigellinus. Moreover, I perceive that you have but a poor opinion of my talent and my 'Troïad,' since you think them worthy of no greater sacrifice than *that*."

Tigellinus turned pale, while Nero, as though he wished to change the conversation, added:

"The summer has come, and at present Rome must be pestilential! Yet, alas! we have to return thither for the summer games!"

Said Tigellinus abruptly:

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"Cæsar, when you have dismissed the other Augustans permit me to remain for a moment in private audience with you."

An hour later Vinicius was returning home from the Imperial villa in company with Petronius.

"For a moment you terrified me," he said. "I believed you to be drunk, and so lost beyond recall. Do not forget that when you act thus you are playing with death."

"It is in Cæsar's palace that my arena lies," replied Petronius carelessly; "and I like to prove that I am a stout gladiator. This evening has, if anything, increased my influence. Cæsar is going to send me his verses in a casket of which the magnificence will about equal the bad taste. I shall tell my physician to use it as a medicine-chest. My aim this evening was to provoke Tigellinus to make a fool of himself. He proposes to try and imitate me, and before my mental eye there rises a vision of what will happen when he has launched out into pranks of that sort! If I chose I could ruin him now, and take his place as prefect of the Prætorian Guards. If I did that I should hold Ahenobarbus himself in the hollow of my hand. Nevertheless I cannot go to so much trouble. I prefer, rather, to continue my present existence—even in company with Cæsar's verses."

"What skill you possess! To think that out of an adverse criticism you can fashion a piece of flattery! But are those verses really so bad? I am no judge of such matters."

"They are no worse than the rest. Certainly, Lucan has more talent in his little finger than Cæsar has in his whole body, but Cæsar possesses something in addition, as well as an immense love for poetry and music. Two days hence we are to hear him sing a hymn to Aphrodite to which he is putting the finishing touches. As audience there will be a company of four—namely, you, myself, Tullius Senecio, and young Nerva. As for his verses, have I not told you that I use them after banquets for the purpose which Vitellius attains with a flamingo's feather? Yet that is not altogether true. Those verses do contain a certain number of eloquent lines—such, for instance, as the lament of Hecuba, in which they voice the pangs of maternity, and in which Cæsar has happened upon some happy turns of speech (probably because he brings forth each stanza in pain and sorrow!). Sometimes I feel sorry for him. By Pollux, what a queer mixture he is! Caligula was ill-balanced, but Nero is a monster pure and simple."

"How far will his folly go?" asked Vinicius.

"No one knows—absolutely no one. Events may

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happen which will terrorise future generations. But what an element of interest does that connote! Though, on occasions, I feel as weary of everything as was Jupiter Ammon in the desert, I imagine that under another Cæsar I should feel a hundred times more so. Your Paul of Judæa is an eloquent man, I admit; and if similar preachers should take to expounding this doctrine, our gods will have to look to their laurels. Also, I admit that, if Cæsar were a Christian, we should all of us rest easier in our beds. Yet your prophet of Tarsus, when putting forward this utilitarian consideration, forgets that, for me, uncertainty constitutes the main attraction of existence. He who plays not with dice will never lose his fortune: yet men *do* play with dice. Also, I have known sons of knights and senators voluntarily become gladiators. You say that I am playing with death, and it is true that I am so; but the reason is that I find the game amusing, whereas your Christian virtues would weary me as speedily as do the dissertations of Seneca. Paul has simply wasted his eloquence upon me. He ought to have understood that men of my stamp cannot possibly admit the truth of his doctrine. With you, however, things are different. Your temperament is bound either to make you detest the name of Christian like a pestilence or to lead you to become a Christian yourself. For myself, I yawn in the very act of admitting that the Christians are right. Something of which we know not is confronting us in the future, something is breaking under our very feet, something is dying before our very eyes—granted; but none the less we know how to die, and, meanwhile, lack the necessary courage to sadden our existences and become, in advance, the slaves of death. Life is worth something for its own sake. You yourself used to find it not wholly unpleasing when you were of our company; and when you were dealing out blows in Armenia, you used to feel occasional yearnings for Rome.”

“ Yes; and now I feel a yearning to be away from it.”

“ Ah!—for the reason that you love a Christian virgin who lives on the other side of the Tiber. Well, I am not surprised at you. What *does* surprise me is the fact that, despite this doctrine which, according to you, is an immensity of happiness, and despite this love which is so soon to be crowned, your face never loses its expression of gloom. Pomponia Græcina looks perennially morose, and you, since you have become a Christian, have ceased even to smile, and have come back to Rome even more doleful than when you left it. If it is *thus* that you love yourself and your fellow Christians, I swear by the flaxen locks of Bacchus that I do not intend to follow in your footsteps.”

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"That is another matter," replied Vinicius; "and I swear, not by the flaxen locks of Bacchus, but by the soul of my father, that never before have I experienced even a foretaste of the happiness which I feel now. Separation, however, is always painful; and, stranger still, whenever I am away from Lygia I seem to be conscious of some impending misfortune. What the misfortune may be, or whence it is coming, I know not; yet in advance I can scent it, even as one scents the gathering of a storm."

"In two days' time I undertake to obtain for you permission to leave Antium for as long a period as you wish. Poppæa is calmer now, and no danger at her hands is threatening either you or Lygia—at all events, no danger of which I am aware."

"To-day she again asked me what my errand in Rome had been, and why I had kept my departure a secret."

"Perhaps she is having you watched; but for the present she will have to reckon with myself."

Vinicius halted a moment, and said:

"Paul teaches us that, though God at times sends warnings, He forbids one to believe in presentiments. Consequently I endeavour to fight against this belief of mine, but with ill success. One night—a night as calm as this one—Lygia and I were sitting side by side, and talking of the future. How happy and peaceful we were I could never express to you. Suddenly the lions began to roar; and though that is a common event in Rome, never since that moment have I known peace of mind. It seemed to me to be a presage of misfortune. You yourself know that I am not easily frightened; yet my heart feels as troubled and anxious as though Lygia were in need of protection from something terrible. One would almost say that that something was the lions. I am in torture about it. Pray obtain for me permission to depart: else I must depart *without* permission."

Petronius burst out laughing.

"As yet," he said, "we have not reached the point of seeing sons of consuls and their wives thrown to the lions in the arena. You may perish by some other death, but not by that. Besides, who knows if it was lions roaring? Those fierce bulls from Germany roar quite as loudly. For myself, I scorn presentiments of every kind. Yesterday the night was calm, and I saw showers of stars shooting across the sky. More than one person felt troubled at the sight, but I said to myself: If among those stars there is my own, at least I shall be well attended."

After a moment's silence, he added:

"Moreover, if your Christ really rose again from the dead,

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He can preserve you from death, even as He preserved Himself."

"Yes, He can," replied Vinicius as he gazed at the star-bespangled heavens.

XIX

NERO was playing and singing a hymn to the Queen of Cyprus—a hymn of which both the words and the music were of his own composition. In very good voice that day, he had no doubt that the performance was entrancing his audience; and this conviction added so much verve to his song, and so agreeably titillated his mind, that he seemed almost to be inspired. At length he grew pale with genuine emotion; and, probably for the first time, he had no wish to hear the applause of his listeners. For a moment or two he remained seated with his hands resting upon the lyre and his head drooping. Then he raised himself quickly, and said:

"I am weary, and have need of air. Meanwhile let the lyre be tuned." He wrapped up his neck again in a silken scarf.

"Come with me," he continued to Petronius and Vinicius, who were sitting in a far corner of the chamber. "Do you, Vinicius, give me your arm, for my strength is failing me. As for Petronius, he is to talk to me of music."

By this time they were on the terrace of the palace—a terrace paved with alabaster, and powdered with saffron.

"Here one can breathe more freely," said Nero. "My mind is troubled and uneasy, although I feel that with what I have just sung to you, by way of a rehearsal, I can fitly appear in public, and win such a triumph as never yet a Roman has received."

"Whether it be here or in Rome or in Achæa, you are *always* fitted to appear in public. I admire you with my whole heart and soul, O divine one," replied Petronius.

"I know it. You are too indolent to stoop to flattery, and also, like Tullius Senecio, too sincere. But you have greater knowledge than he has. Tell me, therefore, what you think of the music."

"Whenever I hear a poem, or whenever I see you driving a chariot in the Circus, or behold a beautiful statue, a magnificent temple, or a picture, I feel that I can comprehend in its entirety what is present to my eyes, and that my admiration of it can embrace its every latent beauty. But whenever I hear music—above all, *your* music—there opens before me a whole world of new fairneshes and new

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delights. I pursue them, and I seize them, but before I have become the possessor of them there come upon me yet others, and again others, like waves of the sea rolling in from the Infinite. Therefore I say that music is like the ocean. We stand upon one shore of it, and gaze into the far distance, yet cannot discern the shore which lies upon the other side."

For a moment or two the three men paced the terrace in silence—a silence broken only by the rustling of the saffron under their feet.

"You have voiced my very thought," said Nero at last: "and that is why I always say that you are the only man in Rome who can understand me. Yes, that is just what I myself feel about music. Whenever I play or sing I see things which I had not hitherto known to be existent in my Empire or the universe. Though I am Cæsar, and the world belongs to me, and my power is unlimited, music reveals to me unthought-of realms, unsailed seas, and new joys of life. I feel that the gods are near me; I catch sight of Olympus; a breath of wind from its heights passes me by; the whole earth seems to be shivering around me. Also"—here the voice of Cæsar trembled with a note of astonishment—"I seem always to see myself—myself who am at once Cæsar and a deity—shrunk to the proportions of a grain of dust! Would you believe it?"

"Yes; for only the greatest artists can feel small in the presence of Beauty."

"This is a night of confidences, and I will open to you my heart. Think you that I am blind or insane? Think you that I do not know that in Rome I am insulted by inscriptions written on walls, that I am called the assassin of my mother and of my wife, that I am looked upon as a monster and an executioner for the mere reason that Tigellinus obtained from me certain death warrants against my enemies? Yes, dear friend; men call me a monster, and I know it. To such an extent has the fable of my cruelty spread that at times I ask myself whether I am *not* cruel. Yet the people do not understand that, though a man's acts may be cruel, the man himself is not so. No one would believe—you yourself, dear friend, would never believe it—that, at moments when music is soothing my soul, I feel as innocent as a child in its cradle. I swear this to you by the stars which are glittering in the sky above us. I say this in all sincerity. No; men do not know all the goodness that lies at the bottom of my heart, nor all the treasures that I discover for myself whenever music has opened its portals to me."

"You need to be known as I alone know you," said

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Petronius. "Rome has never learnt to appreciate your true merits."

Cæsar leant still more heavily upon Vinicius' arm, as though sinking under the weight of injustice. Then he continued:

"Tigellinus has reported to me that it is said in the Senate that Diodorus and Terpnos play the lyre better even than I do. Now, do you, who always speak the truth, tell me in all sincerity whether they play better than, or even as well as, I, Nero?"

"By no means. You have a far more delicate touch than they, as well as far superior execution. In you one can recognise the artist; in them only a couple of skilled artisans. It is not until one has heard their music that one can comprehend the true worth of yours."

"If that be so, they shall continue to live; though they will never know what a service you have rendered them. For the rest, had I condemned them to death, I should have been forced to replace them."

"And it would have been said of you, that, out of love for music, you were exterminating all music within the Empire. Never destroy art for art's sake, O divine one."

"How little you resemble Tigellinus!" replied Nero. "But, look you, I am an artist in *everything*; and since music opens to me an infinity of unspeakable vistas, I owe it to the gods to explore that infinity. Yet, to be admitted to tread the Olympian regions, ought I not first to perform some prodigious propitiatory act? I am accused of being mad. But no, I am not mad—I am merely seeking—"

He broke off, and put his lips close to Petronius' ear; speaking in so low a voice that Vinicius could scarcely hear what he said.

"At the portals of the unknown world I wish to offer the greatest sacrifice of which a man could be capable. My mother, my wife—both of them perished to the same end. But the sacrifice was not sufficient. Entry to the gates of the empyrean must be obtained through a more solemn offering than that. Let the will of the oracles be accomplished."

"What is your plan?"

"You shall see, you shall see—and sooner than you think. Meanwhile, know that there exist two Neros—he whom all men know, and he, the artist, whom you alone know, but who slays as does Mars, and, at times, runs riot as does Bacchus—though only because of the disgust which he feels for the baseness, the insolence of what merits extermination. Oh, how mean will be life when I have disappeared! No one knows—not even you—what an

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artist there is in me. Sometimes my soul feels as mournful as a cypress-tree. What a burden for any man to bear!—the burden of the supreme power and of supreme genius! ”

“ With all my heart I sympathise with your distress, Cæsar; and in that sympathy both the earth and the sea join—let alone Vinicius, who worships you from the bottom of his soul.”

“ Yes, he too has always been dear to me,” said Nero; “ even though it is Mars, and not the Muses, that he serves.”

“ Above all things he is the servant of Aplirodite,” added Petronius. Suddenly he resolved to set his nephew’s affairs in order.

“ Vinicius,” he continued, “ is as much in love with a certain damsel as was Troilus with Cressida. Permit him, therefore, my lord, to return to Rome, or he will pine away under our eyes. Are you aware that the Lygian hostage whom you gave him has been found again, and that Vinicius, on leaving Rome for Antium, left her in the care of a certain Linus? I did not tell you of this before, for the reason that you were busy composing your hymn, which is more important than anything else. Vinicius wished to make her his mistress; but since she has proved to be as virtuous as Lucretia, he has fallen in love with her virtue, and desires to marry her. She comes of a royal line, and therefore he will not debase himself by so doing; yet, being also a good soldier, he awaits with sighs and groans and languishings the authorisation of his Emperor.”

“ The Emperor does not choose wives for soldiers. What need has he of my authorisation? ”

“ This, my lord—that, as I have told you, he has vowed to be your devotee.”

“ Then I authorise the marriage. She is a comely damsel, but too narrow across the hips. Augusta Poppæa once complained to me of her—accusing her of having thrown a spell over our child in the Palatine gardens.”

“ But, as I remarked at the time to Tigellinus, deities are not subject to evil spells. You remember, do you not, how confused Tigellinus grew, and how he cried out that I was right? ”

“ Yes, I remember.”

Turning to Vinicius, Cæsar asked him:

“ Do you love her as much as Petronius says you do? ”

“ Yes, my lord.”

“ Then I order you to leave for Rome to-morrow, to marry the woman, and not to reappear in my presence without the nuptial ring.”

“ From the bottom of my heart and soul I thank you, my lord! ”

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"How sweet it must be to be happy!" said Cæsar.
"Would that I could be as free from care!"

"Accord us your congratulations, O divine one," said Petronius, "and express your will in Augusta's presence. True, Vinicius would never dare to marry a woman against whom Augusta chose to harbour a grudge; but you, my lord, can overcome all opposition by declaring that you have thus ordained."

"Neither to you nor to Vinicius could I refuse anything," said Cæsar.

Upon this he re-entered the villa, and they followed him, their hearts rejoicing at their success.

In the atrium they found Tullius Senecio and young Nerva entertaining Augusta with their gossip, while Terpnos and Diodorus were tuning their citharæ. On entering, Cæsar seated himself upon a stool inlaid with oyster-shells, and, after a few whispered words to a young Greek page, sat waiting.

Presently the page returned with a golden casket, out of which Nero took a necklace of large opals.

"Here are jewels worthy of such a night!" he said.

"Yes, they flash as do the messengers of dawn!" assented Poppæa, feeling sure that the necklace was intended for her.

For a moment Cæsar played with the pink stones.

"Vinicius," he said, "you are to offer this necklace, in my name, to the Lygian princess whom I have ordered you to marry."

Poppæa's gaze, full of anger and stupefaction, shifted from Cæsar to Vinicius, and then to Petronius. He, bending carelessly forward, passed his hand over the frame of a harp, as though he were attentively studying its curvature.

After expressing his gratitude for the necklace, Vinicius approached Petronius.

"How can I ever thank you for what you have done for me to-night?" he said.

"By offering Euterpe a couple of swans, by lavishing your praises upon Cæsar's singing, and by taking no notice of presentiments. I hope that the roaring of the lions will never trouble either your sleep or that of your Lygian lily."

"No," replied Vinicius. "I now feel free from anxiety."

"Then may Fortuna smile upon you! But wait a moment. Again Cæsar is taking his lute into his hand! Hold your breath, listen attentively, and shed as many tears as you can."

True enough, Nero had risen—his lute in his hand, and his eyes raised to the ceiling. All conversation ceased in

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the chamber, and the audience remained as motionless as though they had been turned into stone. Only Terpnos and Diodorus, who were to accompany Cæsar, kept directing their heads, now towards Cæsar, now towards one another, in readiness for the first notes of the song.

Suddenly from the vestibule there came the sound of tumult and shouting; and, on the curtains before the door being withdrawn, there appeared on the threshold the Emperor's freedman Phao, with, behind him, the consul Lecanius.

Nero frowned.

"Pardon, divine Emperor," said Phao, panting; "but Rome is on fire! Nearly the whole of the city is in flames!"

All who were present leapt to their feet. Nero laid down his lyre, and cried:

"Ye gods! Then at last I shall see a city burning! At last I shall be able to complete my 'Troiad'!"

Turning to the consul, he continued:

"If I were to leave immediately, should I arrive in time to view the fire?"

"My lord," replied the consul, looking as white as a sheet, "the city is a sea of flame. The smoke is stifling the inhabitants, who are either falling to earth, suffocated, or throwing themselves into the fire in a state of madness. Rome is lost, my lord!"

The silence was broken only by Vinicius.

"Woe is me!" he exclaimed. "Woe, woe is me!"

And, throwing off his toga, the young man rushed from the palace.

Nero raised his arms above his head, and cried:

"Woe unto you, thrice sacred city of Priam!"

PART III

I

VINICIUS had just time to order some slaves to follow him before, mounting his horse, he set off at full speed through the dark streets of Antium in the direction of Laurentum. The terrible news had thrown him into a sort of frenzy. He had a feeling, as he galloped, that misfortune had mounted behind the horse, and, crying in his ear, "Rome is on fire!" and ever lashing the animal, was urging both it and him into the vortex of the flames. Onwards he rode—his bare head bowed to his horse's withers, his only garment a tunic, and his eyes taking no heed of obstacles, or of what lay ahead of him.

His mount, an Idumcan stallion, sped on its way like an arrow. Here and there the clatter of its hoofs awoke dogs, which greeted the passage of the shadowy apparition with loud bayings, and then continued to howl at the moon. Long ago the slaves who were galloping in his wake on tardier steeds had been out-distanced; so that alone he passed through sleeping Laurentum towards Ardea, where, with Aricia, Bovilla, and Ustrinum, he had posted relays of horses.

Beyond Ardea he seemed to see a brilliant red glare in the north-eastern sky. Possibly it was the first glow of sunrise, for the month was July, and the night was far spent; yet Vinicius could not restrain a cry of rage and despair, for he thought the light to be the reflection of the fire. He remembered Lecanius' words, "The city is a sea of flame"; and for a moment he thought that he should go mad. All hope of saving Lygia, or even of arriving at the city gates before Rome had been reduced to ashes, had now left him, and his thoughts kept flying ahead of his progress like a flock of black, ill-omened birds. In what quarter of the city the fire had broken out he knew not, but supposed it to have been in the Trans-Tiberian region, with its closely-packed houses, woodyards, and frail shanties for the sale and purchase of slaves.

Fires were a frequent phenomenon in Rome, and not unseldom were accompanied by violence and pillage at the hands of the cosmopolitan mob whose headquarters were the purlicus beyond the river. Suddenly Vinicius

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remembered Ursus and his colossal strength. Yet what could he or any man, even a Titan, do against the devastating force of a conflagration? For years past it had been said that, by hundreds of thousands, the slaves were dreaming of the times of Spartacus, and only awaiting an opportunity to take up arms against their oppressors, as well as against the city in general. And now such an opportunity had surely come. Was, then, the glare of the flames serving to illuminate a scene also of massacre and civil war?

Again, Vinicius remembered the many conversations which, with strange insistence, Cæsar had turned upon the subject of burning cities. Yes, it must be that Cæsar had ordered Rome to be fired. He alone could have dared such a crime, just as Tigellinus alone could have been charged with its execution. And if Rome was burning by Cæsar's orders, who could guarantee that the same orders had not launched the Prætorian Guards, sword in hand, against the populace? Incendiarism, slaves in revolt, massacre, unthinkable chaos, madness, every destructive element let loose—and in the midst of it all Lygia!

The horse laboured heavily as it ascended the slope towards Aricia. Vinicius, crouching upon its back, and twining his fingers into its mane, could almost have bitten its neck in his rage. Suddenly a horseman who was galloping at the same breakneck speed as himself shouted as he met and passed him like a hurricane: "Rome is lost!" What more he may have said was lost in the double thunder of the hoofs; except that Vinicius also caught the words, "the gods." Nevertheless those words served to restore him to consciousness. "The gods!" He raised his head, and, with hands stretched to heaven, prayed as follows:

"I ask not help of the gods whose sanctuaries are crumbling in the flames, but of Thee alone. Thou also hast suffered, Thou alone art pitiful, Thou alone dost comprehend human pain. It was to teach us mortals compassion that Thou didst come upon earth. Have pity upon us now. If Thou art as Peter and Paul have said Thou art, save my Lygia. Take her into Thine arms, and lift her far above the flames. For Thou canst do this. Only grant my prayer, and I will repay Thee with my blood. Even shouldst Thou not do it for my sake, do it for hers. She loves Thee, she has put her whole trust in Thee. True, Thou dost promise life and happiness after death, but happiness after death will not fail her, and meanwhile she does not wish to die. Suffer her, therefore, to live. Thou canst do this if Thou wilt."

Here Vinicius broke off, for he felt that his prayer was becoming, rather, a threat, a sacrilegious utterance. Lashing

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his steed more and more violently, he soon saw shining under the beams of the moon the white walls of Aricia, which was the half-way post to Rome. At furious speed he passed the woodland temple of Mercury which adjoined the town, and as he did so he could see that the news was known there, since the temple was the centre of an unusual amount of movement. By the light of torches he could discern multitudes of people flocking along the paths which converged upon the building, in order to place themselves under the protection of the god; while on the highway other groups hurriedly parted before the impatient, irresistible gallop of the horseman. On every side he could hear cries of "Rome is on fire! The city is burning! Ye gods, save Rome!"

The horse stumbled, but recovered itself just as Vinicius reined it back on to its haunches before the tavern where the relay was posted. Slaves hastened to do his bidding, but, on catching sight of a detachment of mounted Prætorians who, doubtless, were hastening to Antium with the news, Vinicius rushed to meet them.

"What quarter of the city is burning?" he asked.

"Who are you?" countered the decurion.

"Vinicius, a military tribune, and an Augustan. Answer me if you value your life!"

"My lord, the fire broke out among the booths near the Great Circus, and at the time of our departure it had reached also the centre of the city."

"And the quarter beyond the Tiber?"

"Thither the fire had not penetrated; but the flames were continually involving fresh portions of Rome, and nothing can arrest their fury."

At this moment a fresh horse was brought Vinicius, and he at once mounted it.

His course now lay towards Albanum—leaving Alba Longa and its splendid lake on the right. After Aricia the road ascended a steep slope which concealed the horizon; but Vinicius knew that, once arrived at the summit (behind which there nestled Albanum), he would be able to see not only Bovilla and Ustrinum, where his next horses were in waiting, but also Rome itself, since below Albanum there extended, on either side of the Appian Way, the plain of the Campania.

"From that point onwards I shall be able to watch the flames," he said to himself as he lashed his horse anew.

Even before he had arrived at the summit he could feel a breeze fanning his face, and catch with his nostrils the smell of smoke; while, over the crest of the ascent, faint flashes of light were beginning to become visible.

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"It is the fire," he muttered.

By this time night had yielded to dawn, and on the surrounding hills there were playing reflections of pink and gold—first heralds of the morning which might themselves have been mistaken for the glow of the conflagration. Vinicius strained every nerve to attain the summit. When he had done so he beheld the following spectacle.

The entire valley lay shrouded in smoke. Towns, aqueducts, houses, trees—all had disappeared beneath the moving pall. Only at the far extremity of that grey, brooding curtain was there burning, seated on its seven hills, the city.

Yet the conflagration had not taken the form of a column of flame, as happens when an isolated edifice is being consumed. Rather, it had taken the form of a long, broad slash of fire, with, above it, a towering rampart of smoke that, tinted here with rose-colour, and there deepening to black, was sending forth roll upon roll of dense, swelling vapour. At times this monstrous rampart seemed to envelop part of the slash of flame itself, which thereupon contracted to the width of a ribbon. Then again the latter would illuminate the base of the smoke pall, and convert its heavy folds into glowing billows. Together, the great border of fire and the rampart of smoke enclosed the horizon like a belt of forest, so that the Sabine Hills were no longer visible.

At first sight it seemed to Vinicius that not only the city of Rome, but also the whole universe was being devoured by the flames, and that no living being could possibly escape from that sea of fire and smoke. Every moment the wind which was blowing from the city was growing stronger, and causing particles of soot to fall like rain. Day had fully broken, and over the crests of the hills which bordered the Alban Lake the sun was shining. Yet the pale rays of the morning looked russet-hued, as though the dense vapour from the burning city had dulled their brilliancy; and as Vinicius descended the slope towards Albanum he kept plunging into smoke of ever-increasing pungency. The entire population of Albanum had come forth into the streets, and seemed, in their terror, to have but one thought—namely, "What is happening in Rome?" Even here breathing was difficult.

Vinicius forced himself to act.

"It is impossible," he reflected, "that the fire can have overrun every quarter of the city. The wind is blowing from the north, and therefore driving the smoke in this direction; but the further side of the city, the region beyond the Tiber, may be clear, seeing that it is isolated by

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the river. One would have but to pass through the Janiculate Gate to be out of danger. It is impossible, therefore, that the whole population can have perished. Even in captured cities, where massacre is let loose as well as fire, a certain proportion of the inhabitants always escapes. Why, then, should I take it for granted that Lygia is dead? Moreover, a God who has conquered death watches over her." Again he offered up a prayer—imploping Christ, as was his custom to do, with promises of offerings.

As soon as he had passed Albanum, where almost the whole of the population was posted in trees or on roofs, to view the fire, he recovered his presence of mind. In addition to Linus and Ursus, the Apostle Peter would be watching over Lygia. From the moment that Peter had blessed his love and promised him his beloved it had become impossible that she should perish in the flames. Indeed, under the influence of a sleepless night, a headlong gallop, and terrible emotion Vinicius was inclined to be light-headed, and to think that anything was possible. Peter, he thought, would conjure the flames with the sign of the cross, and drive them back with a word, so that he and his companions could walk without danger between two walls of fire. Besides, Peter was able to foretell the future. Beyond doubt he had prophesied the present calamity, and so would have been warned to remove his Christians out of the city, with, among them, Lygia, whom he loved as though she had been his own daughter. Every moment hope was growing in Vinicius' breast. If they had taken to flight, perhaps he would find them at Bovilla, or meet them on the way. At intervals the adored face of Lygia seemed to be gazing at him out of the smoke which, in ever-thickening folds, was spreading over the Campania.

His expectation seemed the more likely to be realised in that he kept meeting numbers of people who were making their way from the city to the Alban Hills, where they hoped, after escaping the fire, to get clear of the smoke. In fact, before reaching Ustrinum he found it necessary to slacken his pace, so encumbered had the road become. In addition to pedestrians carrying their household goods on their backs, he saw horses and mules laden with baggage, and also chariots and litters. Ustrinum itself was crowded with refugees to such an extent that to force a passage through its streets was a matter of difficulty. Everywhere—in the main square, in the side streets, and under the columns of the temples—people were swarming. Here and there a certain number of tents were being pitched to shelter families, but the majority of the fugitives were camping in the open air, and alternately bewailing themselves, implor-

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ing help of the gods, and cursing their fate. Amid this hubbub it was not easy to gather information. Persons whom Vinicius addressed either returned him no answer or, meeting his gaze with eyes full of terror, ejaculated that the city must perish, and the world with it. Every moment fresh numbers of men, women, and children kept arriving from Rome to swell the confusion and tumult. Some of the newcomers, lost in the crowd, were despairingly calling for their companions. Others were fighting among themselves for the possession of a shelter. Also, numbers of rustic herdsmen and semi-savage peasants had flocked into the town in quest of news or in expectation of loot, for the general disorder facilitated thieving; while, in addition, slaves of every nationality had, with gladiators, begun to break into the houses, and to fight such soldiers as hastened to the defence of the inhabitants.

The senator Junius, of whom Vinicius caught sight near a tavern, surrounded by a troupe of Batavian slaves, was the first to give him any distinct details of the fire. The blaze had broken out near the Great Circus, at a spot near the Palatine and Cælian Hills; whence it had spread with extraordinary rapidity, until it had embraced the whole of the centre of the city. Never since the time of Brennus had so terrible a disaster fallen upon Rome.

"The Circus is in ashes," said Junius, "as well as the shops and houses which used to surround it. Also, both the Aventine and the Cælian quarters are on fire; and, after circling the Palatine, the flames have reached the Carinæ."

And Junius, late owner of a splendid villa at that spot—a villa which had been filled with the works of art that delighted his heart—seized a handful of dust, sprinkled it upon his head, and subsided into groans.

Vinicius took him by the shoulders, and shook him.

"My villa too is near the Carinæ," he said. "Yet, since everything is perishing, let that villa perish with the rest."

Then, remembering that, in accordance with his advice, Lygia might have removed to the Aulus mansion, he asked Junius:

"What of the Vicus Patricius?"

"It is on fire," replied the other.

"And the quarter beyond the Tiber?"

Junius looked astonishment.

"What does that quarter matter?" he countered.

"This: that I set more store upon that portion of Rome than upon all the rest of the city." Vinicius' voice rang with enthusiasm.

"Then you will be able to reach it only by way of the Via Portuosa. Otherwise the fire round the Aventine will

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suffocate you. I know nothing of the Trans-Tiberian quarter, but imagine that the fire could not have reached it at the time I departed. Yet the gods only know if it is not burning now."

For a moment or two Junius hesitated. Then he resumed in a lower key:

"I know that you will not betray me; and, that being so, I may tell you that this is not an ordinary fire. No help was allowed to be taken to the Circus, and when the mansions around it also caught fire I with my own ears heard thousands of voices shout: 'Death to those who extinguish the flames!' Also, certain persons ran through the city, throwing lighted torches into the houses. On the other hand, the people are in revolt, and crying out that the city has been set on fire to order. More I cannot say. Woe to the city and to all of us! What is going on within the walls no human tongue could express. The inhabitants are either perishing in the vortex of flame or cutting one another's throats amid the tumult."

Again he repeated, "Woe to the city and to all of us!" But by this time Vinicius was once more urging his horse along the Appian Way.

The city was being blotted out by a fiery monster. It was giving forth the most frightful heat. Even the roar of the multitude was powerless to drown the roar of the flames.

II

IF it was difficult to reach Rome it was still more difficult to enter it. So Vinicius halted, and took stock of the situation.

On both sides of the Appian Way the houses, the fields, and the gardens had been transformed into encampments. Even the temple of Mars by the roadside had been forcibly entered during the night, in the hope that it might afford a refuge; while in the cemeteries men were fighting madly for possession of the larger mausoleums. With all its disorder, Ustrinum had been only a shadow of the scene which was in progress under the walls of the capital itself.

Nothing any longer counted—neither the majesty of the law, nor official authority, nor family ties, nor distinctions of classes. Slaves were bludgeoning citizens, and bands of gladiators who had made themselves drunk on wine stolen from the Emporium were terrorising the by-streets, and assaulting and robbing men of noble birth. Also, great numbers of barbarians had absconded from the booths

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where they had been on sale, since, for them, the firing of the city meant an end of slavery and the hour of vengeance; and whilst the more respectable portion of the population was holding out despairing hands to the gods, these absconding barbarians were plundering the males of that portion, and violating the females. Also they were joined by a certain proportion of slaves in service—poor wretches whose only clothing was a wisp of linen round the loins—a population which was never seen in the streets by day, and the existence of which in Rome might hardly have been suspected. This mob, composed of Asiatics, Africans, Greeks, Thracians, Germans, and Britons, was taking its revenge for its years of bondage, and voicing its fury in every jargon of the universe. Vinicius had seen cities taken by force of arms, but never anything comparable to this chaos of despair, savage joy, delirium, and debauchery where, set on her seven hills, the Mistress of the World was burning.

The young tribune contrived to make his way as far as the Appian Gate; but, arrived thither, he saw that it would be impossible to penetrate into the city by way of the Porta Capena, not only because of the crowd, but also because of the flames, which were already licking the air with their tongues behind the Porta itself. Besides, to gain the other side of the Tiber he would have had to make for the Pons Sublicius—that is to say, to cross the Aventine Hill, which was inundated with a perfect ocean of fire. The idea was out of the question.

That being so, Vinicius understood that he would have to return in the direction of Ustrinum, and, leaving the Appian Way, to cross the river below the city, and thus reach the Via Portuosa, which led direct to the Trans-Tiberian quarter. Yet even this would not be an easy task to accomplish, by reason of the growing disorder that was reigning on the Appian Way. He would have to cut his way through the mob, sword in hand—and on his person he had not a single weapon!

Near the fountain of Mercury, however, he recognised a centurion who, at the head of a few score Prætorians, was guarding the approach to the temple's precincts. This man Vinicius ordered to accompany him; and the centurion, knowing the military tribune and Augustan by sight, dared offer no refusal.

Vinicius took command of the detachment, and, forgetful of Paul's teaching concerning love for one's neighbour, charged the crowd with a speed fatal to any one who was not prepared for it. He was followed by curses and stones, but these he did not heed, since his immediate aim was to

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attain a spot where there was greater room to move. Yet an advance could be made only by the greatest possible efforts. Those who had already taken up camping positions declined to yield passage, and showered maledictions upon Cæsar and upon the Prætorians. Indeed, there were times when the crowd threatened to become dangerously hostile. Certain of its members harangued their fellows, accused Cæsar of being the incendiary, rhapsodised over the patience of the Romans, called them sluggards, and promised to consign Nero and Poppæa to the Tiber. On every side there resounded cries of "Buffoon! Mummer! Parricide!" and only a leader was needed to have turned the mob's exasperation into open revolt.

After many scuffles and much surmounting of boxes, casks, valuable furniture, kitchen utensils, bedding, chariots, and hand-carts, Vinicius and his Prætorians succeeded in getting clear of the throng. He had now traversed the length of several streets, and had worked his way round a number of villas, gardens, cemeteries, and temples. The spot which he had eventually reached was the Vicus Alexandri, the quarter which flanked the Tiber. Here the confusion was less terrible, and the smoke less dense. From fugitives he learnt that only a few streets of the Trans-Tiberian quarter had yet become enveloped in the fire, although it was doubtful whether any part of that quarter would ultimately escape the violence of the conflagration, seeing that individuals were purposely feeding the flames and permitting no one to extinguish them, on the plea that they, the incendiaries, were but obeying orders. The young tribune no longer hesitated to believe that Cæsar had given commands for the city to be fired; and therefore the vengeance clamoured for by the mob appeared to him just. For what more could Mithridates, or any other implacable enemy of Rome, have done? Vinicius felt convinced that the fatal hour had sounded for Nero, and that in its fall the city would and must crush the monstrous buffoon and all his crimes. If only there should arise a man with the hardihood to put himself at the head of the exasperated population, within a few hours that event would have been accomplished. And as Vinicius stood there some bold thoughts, some bold ideas of vengeance, passed through his mind. His family, which came of an unbroken line of consuls, was known to all Rome. The mob needed but a name to head it. Once already, in connection with the condemning to death of the four hundred slaves who had been in the service of Pedanius Secundus, the city had come within an ace of rebellion and civil war. What, then, might not happen to-day in face

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of a calamity which surpassed any disaster that Rome had yet suffered during her eight centuries of existence?

"The man who calls to arms the Quirites," said Vinicius to himself, "will to a certainty overturn Nero, and assume the purple."

Why, then, should not he, Vinicius, be that man? He was more energetic, more courageous, and more youthful than his fellow Augustans. True, Nero had at his disposal the thirty legions who were camped on the frontiers of the Empire; but would not those legions themselves rise, with their commanders, on learning of the burning of Rome and its temples? In that case he, Vinicius, might actually become Cæsar! Already it had been whispered among the Augustans that a prophet had predicted the purple to Otho: but was not he as good as Otho? Perhaps Christ Himself would come to aid him with His divine power? Perhaps Christ it was that at this moment was inspiring his mind with these thoughts?

"How I should revenge myself upon Nero for all the dangers that Lygia is running, and for my own terrors!" thought the young man. "Also, I would cause truth and justice to reign everywhere, and spread the doctrine of Christ from the Euphrates to the foggy shores of Britain, while at the same time I should clothe my Lygia in purple, and make of her the sovereign of the universe!"

However, it was not long before these thoughts, which had been spurting from his brain as a shower of sparks spurts from a house in flames, flew away like the sparks of actuality. Before all things it was necessary to save Lygia. He could now see the catastrophe at closer quarters, and fear seized him at the sight. Also, in face of this sea of flame and smoke, he felt obliged to abandon the conviction that the Apostle Peter would save Lygia. Vinicius then set out along the Via Portuosa, which led direct to the Trans-Tiberian quarter, and grew calmer only when he had reached the Porta itself. There he was again told what fugitives had already told him—namely, that the greater part of the quarter in question was still untouched, but that at more than one point the flames had leaped the river.

He found the quarter full of smoke, as well as of a multitude through which it was even more difficult to carve a passage than it had been before, for the reason that, having a greater amount of time in front of them, the people there were carrying away and saving a greater quantity of goods. These, in places, entirely blocked the Via Portuosa; and near the Naumachia Augusta enormous piles of heterogeneous commodities reared their bulk. As for the smaller streets, where the smoke hung in denser masses, they were

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impassable. Everywhere their denizens were taking to flight, and sometimes a couple of fugitives would collide with one another in a narrow passage, and engage in a struggle to the death. Thus men were fighting and wrangling; families had got separated in the confusion; mothers were calling for their children with cries of despair. Vinicius shuddered at the thought of what must be taking place in still closer proximity to the flames. Amid the uproar and confusion it was impossible to obtain guidance or to understand an appeal. Every moment fresh eddies of smoke would come rolling from the other side of the river, and hang so densely that, sweeping along the level of the ground, they hid houses, people, and everything from view. At length, however, a wind which was accompanying the conflagration dispersed them, and Vinicius was able to make his way to the neighbourhood of the little street in which stood Linus' dwelling. The heat of the July day was insupportable. The smoke stung the eyes and choked the breath. Those of the inhabitants who had hitherto clung to their homes in the hope that the flames would fail to leap the river were now beginning to abandon their dwellings. As for the Prætorians who had accompanied Vinicius, they had fallen to the rear; and in the confusion his horse, which had been wounded in the head with a blow from a hammer, reared upon its hind legs, and refused to obey the rein. On the Augustan being recognised by his rich tunic, cries arose of "Death to Nero and his incendiaries!" and hundreds of threatening arms were extended in Vinicius' direction; but his horse took fright, and galloped away—upsetting the young tribune's assailants as it did so, and a fresh wave of smoke plunged the street into obscurity. Judging that he could proceed no further on horseback, Vinicius dismounted, and set off at a run—feeling his way along the walls, and sometimes finding himself forced to wait until a throng of hurrying fugitives had passed him. Yet he told himself that his efforts were in vain. Possibly Lygia was no longer in the city—possibly she had taken to flight. In any case it would be easier to find a pin on the seashore than to recover a young girl from this chaos. Nevertheless, even if it cost him his life, he would win through to Linus' dwelling. From time to time he halted to rub his eyes. Next, he tore a piece of stuff from his tunic, and used it to muffle his nose and mouth. Then he resumed his way. In proportion as he approached the river, the heat grew worse; and since he knew that the conflagration had first broken out near the Great Circus, he imagined that the increase of heat must come from the Circus' ruins, as well as from those of the Forum Boarium and the

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Velabrum (both of which, being situated in the same neighbourhood, would equally have fallen a prey to the flames). One fugitive, the last whom Vinicius met (it was an old man on crutches), cried out to the patrician as he passed: "Do not go near the Pons Cestius, for the whole Island is on fire!" True enough, no illusion as to the situation was any longer possible. As he turned into the street of the Jews, where Linus' house was situated, the young tribune caught sight of flames bursting from a cloud of smoke. Not only was the whole Island on fire, but also the Trans-Tiberian quarter—and, in particular, the end of the street in which Lygia was lodging!

Vinicius then remembered that Linus' house was surrounded by a garden, and that behind that garden, on the bank of the Tiber, there lay a small, open space of ground. The thought gave him courage, for it meant that the flames might have come to a halt at that space. Thus hoping, he again started to run, although every breath of wind was choking him, not only with smoke, but also with thousands of sparks which at any moment might carry the fire to the other end of the thoroughfare, and so cut off his retreat.

At length, however, he perceived through the pall of smoke the cypress-trees of Linus' garden. The houses beyond the open plot of ground were already blazing like piles of wood, but Linus' little villa was intact. Vinicius looked up gratefully to heaven, and then made a rush for Linus' door, although the air was beginning actually to burn him. The door was half-open. He pushed it fully so, and darted into the interior of the house.

In the little garden not a soul was visible, and the place seemed completely deserted.

"The smoke and the heat may have made them lose consciousness," thought the young man.

He called aloud: "Lygia, Lygia!"

Silence. In that lonely spot nothing was to be heard but the distant roaring of the fire.

"Lygia!"

Then his ear caught the same mournful sound that he had heard once before in that garden. It meant that, on the neighbouring Island, the fire had made its appearance in the vicinity of the vivarium beside the temple of Æsculapius, and that the animals which were confined there were beginning to roar. Vinicius shuddered from head to foot. On this second occasion also, when all his thoughts were concentrated upon Lygia, those terrible voices sounded like an omen of misfortune.

Yet this was only a fleeting impression. In a moment the roar of the flames—a sound far more terrible than the howls

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of wild beasts—had driven the thought out of his head. Lygia had not replied to his calls, yet she might be present in the building, whether stifled with the smoke or sunken into a state of unconsciousness. Rushing forward into the interior of the house, he found the little atrium deserted; but, on groping for and finding the door which led to the cubicula, he at length caught sight of a lamp. Approaching nearer, he saw that the lamp was burning in the *lararium* where, in place of statuettes of the gods, there stood a cross; and under it was the lamp in question. In a flash there passed through the mind of the young convert an idea that the cross had sent him this light to aid him in his search for Lygia. Taking up the lamp, he ran to the cubicula, and, pushing aside the curtain of the first one, raised the lamp aloft, and gazed around him.

No one was there. Yet there could be no doubt that this was Lygia's cubiculum that he had found, since suspended to pegs on the wall were some of her garments, while on the bed there was lying the *capitium*, or shift worn next the body. Vinicius seized and kissed the *capitium*, and, throwing it over his shoulder, continued his search. The house was so small that it was not long before he had visited every room, even the cellars. In none of them was a soul visible. With the other inhabitants of the quarter, Lygia, Linus, and Ursus must have sought safety in flight.

"Then I must go and look for them among the crowd outside the city gates," thought the young man. He was not greatly astonished that he had not met them in the *Via Portuosa*, since they must have left the quarter on the opposite side, towards the Vatican Hill. In any case they were now safe from the flames.

"First of all I must get clear of this place," continued Vinicius to himself; "and then I must reach the Gardens of Agrippa by way of the Gardens of Domitia. Somewhere in that neighbourhood I shall find them, since, inasmuch as the wind is blowing from the Sabine Hills, the smoke will be less suffocating there."

And, in very truth, the moment had come when no longer had he any choice but to consult his own safety, for the wave of flame which had started from the Island was fast approaching, and eddies of smoke were rendering the little street almost impassable. Suddenly a current of air extinguished the lamp which had served to light him in the house; whereupon, rushing into the street, he put his best foot forward to regain the *Via Portuosa* from which he had deviated. As he went the flames seemed to be pursuing him—now encircling him with wreaths of smoke, now covering him with sparks which fell upon his hair, neck, and

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clothing. In fact, his tunic had actually begun to smoulder in places, but of this he took no notice, since his chief aim was to get clear of the place before he should be suffocated. His mouth was full of the taste of smoke and of soot, and his throat and lungs seemed to be on fire; while the blood was mounting to his head to such an extent that at intervals everything looked to him red, including even the smoke itself.

"The fire will surely run me down," he thought. "It would be better for me to give up the struggle and perish."

The exertion of running had greatly exhausted him, and his head, neck, and shoulders were bathed in a sweat which burnt his skin like boiling water. But for Lygia's name, which he kept repeating to himself in thought, as well as for the capitium, with which he had covered his mouth, he must have fallen. He could not recognise the street in which he was, for consciousness was leaving him. His one thought was that he must flee, since out there, in the open country, there was waiting for him the Lygia who had been promised him by the Apostle Peter. And suddenly there came upon him a strange feeling of certainty, the certainty of a fit of delirium, the certainty of a vision of agony—a certainty that he should again see her, that he should marry her, and that he should die immediately afterwards.

Like a drunken man he ran on and on—staggering from one side of the street to the other. Suddenly there occurred a change in the horrible cauldron in which the great city was seething. At the spot where the fire had been slowly incubating flames suddenly burst forth in a blazing mass, for the wind had ceased to form new eddies of smoke, and those which had gathered in the narrow streets were quickly dispersed by a whirlwind of heated air. Before its rush the whirlwind carried myriads of sparks, so that Vinicius seemed to be running amid a nimbus of flame; but, as compensation for this, he could see better, and perceived that he had almost reached the end of the street. The sight afforded him renewed strength; and, turning a corner, he found himself in an alley which led to the Via Portuosa and the Campus Codetanus. Here the sparks ceased to harass him so much, and he understood that, once he could reach the Via Portuosa, he was safe.

The further end of the alley, however, was veiled in darkness. "If that be smoke," he thought to himself, "I shall never be able to pass through it safely." However he pulled himself together, threw off his tunic (which had begun to burn his flesh), and ran forward naked save for Lygia's capitium, which he had placed over his head and

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mouth. On approaching nearer, he perceived that what he had taken for smoke was a cloud of dust, and that from it voices and human cries were issuing.

"It is the mob engaged in pillaging," he said to himself.

Nevertheless he continued on his way in the direction of the voices, for at least there were men there who might help him. With this hope in his mind he shouted to them as loud as he could; but it was his last effort—the red veil before his eyes had become redder still, and, air failing his lungs, he fell prostrate.

Yet he had been heard—or, rather, he had been seen, for two men came running to him with gourds of water. One of these Vinicius seized, and half-emptied at a draught.

"I thank you," he said. "Pray also help me to my feet, and then I will continue my way alone."

The other man poured some water over the young tribune's head, and then the pair carried him towards their comrades. Surrounding him, the latter inquired of him whether he were not too severely injured to walk; and such solicitude surprised him.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"We are persons engaged in demolishing the houses, in order to prevent the fire from reaching the *Via Portuosa*," replied one of the workmen.

"Well, you have helped me, and I thank you."

"It is our duty always to help our neighbour," came the response in chorus.

Then Vinicius who, since morning, had beheld nothing but ferocious crowds, fighting, and pillage, looked more attentively at the faces around him, and said:

"May Christ Himself reward you!"

"And may His name be glorified!" cried the voices in answer.

"Is Linus—?"

But he did not hear the reply, since he had fainted with emotion—worn out by the efforts which he had made. When he recovered consciousness he was lying in a garden of the *Campus Codetanus*, surrounded by men and women. The first words he uttered were:

"Where is Linus?"

For a moment there was no reply. Then a voice which Vinicius knew said:

"He has departed by the *Porta Nomentana*. He left for *Ostrianum* two days ago. Peace be with you, King of the Persians!"

Vinicius raised himself in astonishment at beholding Chilo, and then sank back again.

The Greek continued:

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"By this time, my lord, your villa is probably in ashes, since the whole Carinæ is on fire. Nevertheless you will always be as rich as Cræsus. What a calamity is this! Long ago, O son of Serapis, the Christians prophesied that fire would destroy the city. Linus is at Ostrianum with the daughter of Jupiter. What a misfortune is this that has come upon Rome!"

Again Vinicius felt his strength failing him.

"And have you seen them?" he inquired.

"Yes, my lord. Thanks be to Christ and to all the gods that I am thus able to repay your kindness with good news! Yes, divine Osiris, I am determined to requite you in kind. By the flames which are consuming the city I swear that I will do it."

Without, evening was falling, but within the garden all was light, since the conflagration had just blazed forth afresh. It seemed as though not isolated quarters, but the whole length and breadth, of the city were on fire—so much so that the sky was red to its remotest depths, and even the shadows of night were tinged with red.

III

IN fact, the reflection of the blazing city had turned the heavens purple to the confines of the horizon; and as the full moon rose, that luminary looked as though it were made of beaten brass. In the depths of the rose-coloured sky a thousand rose-coloured stars were twinkling; yet, contrary to what was usually the case by night, the earth was gleaming even brighter than the heavens. Over the whole of the Campania Rome was sending forth a glare—a blood-red glare that was causing the most distant hills, buildings, villas, and temples to stand out clearly; while along each one of the aqueducts which converged upon the city from the neighbouring heights there were clustered people who had sought refuge upon them, or were using them as vantage-points from which to view the spectacle.

Meanwhile the cataclysm was swallowing up one portion of the city after another; nor could there any longer be a doubt that it was being fed by incendiaries, for at every moment new fires kept breaking forth, even at a great distance from the main conflagration.

From the hills on which the city was built the flames spread, like waves of the sea, over level spaces which contained numerous buildings of five or six storeys, through streets which abounded in shops, booths, portable

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theatres that were built of wooden planks for the presentation of one or another spectacle, and through warehouses filled with wood, oil, grain, walnuts, and pineapples. Thus fed with an abundant store of inflammable matter, the conflagration proceeded by a series of explosions; and the people who were camping outside the city or had taken up their post on the aqueducts could recognise the nature of the combustible by the colour of the flames.

Every now and then an air-spout would cause myriads of glowing walnut and almond shells to shoot heavenwards from the abyss, and to ascend, crackling and bursting, into the sky like incandescent butterflies. At other times, driven by the wind, these red-hot shells would descend in showers upon other quarters of the city, or even upon the fields and aqueducts outside it. Help appeared impossible. Every hour the confusion was growing worse, for though the population of Rome was fleeing by every gate, the inhabitants of the surrounding suburbs and small towns, as well as the half-savage peasants and herdsmen of the Campania, were flocking citywards, in the hope of plunder or in response to the attraction of the spectacle.

Indeed, only the sight afforded by the city in flames—a sight which absorbed the general attention—delayed the hour of carnage. Hundreds of thousands of slaves, forgetting that Rome possessed nearly fifty legions throughout the world, seemed to be awaiting but the signal and a leader. Unfortunately for them, no Spartacus had yet come to hand. Also, at the approach to every gate the most monstrous rumours were current. It was Vulcan, said some, who, by Jupiter's orders, had unchained the fires of the infernal regions. Others said that it was Vesta avenging the outrage done to Rubria. Others declared that Cæsar had set fire to the city in order to rid himself of the disturbing odours of the Suburra, as well as to clear the site for a new city which he purposed to call Neronia. A fourth story had it that Cæsar had gone mad, that he had ordered his Prætorians and gladiators to attack the people, and that a general massacre was imminent. Some men also swore by their gods that Ahenobarbus had had all the beasts in the vivaria let loose, and that the streets were full of lions with manes on fire, elephants mad with fear, and wild bulls which were trampling people to death by the hundred. In these tales there was a certain grain of truth, since in more than one vivarium the elephants had demolished their stalls to escape the fire, and, thus free, had stampeded in a panic which caused widespread destruction.

Between the Capitol on one side and the Quirinal, Viminal, and Esquiline Hills on the other, as well as

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between the Palatine and the Hill of Cælius (where the most populous thoroughfares met), the conflagration had broken out at so many different points at once that the fugitives, no matter in which direction they set out, always found themselves confronted with a wall of flame. Those who had sought refuge in the markets and the squares, or in the precincts of the temples of Terra, Silvia, Juno, and Lucinia, or between the Clivus Vibrius and the ancient Porta Esquilina, had been surrounded by the flames, and burnt to death. Scarcely a family resident in the centre of the city had been spared by the conflagration.

Whilst some were imploring the mercy of the gods, others were blaspheming those gods as the authors of the frightful catastrophe. Old men would stretch out their hands towards the temple of Jupiter Liberator, and cry: "Liberator thou art named! Save, then, thy altar and thy city!" In particular, the rage of the mob was turned against the ancient deities of Rome, who, though believed by the people to be specially charged with the care of the city, had shown themselves impotent. In revenge, on the appearance, in the Via Asinaria, of a procession of Egyptian priests bearing a statue of Isis which had been miraculously preserved from the flames, the crowd harnessed itself to the processional car, dragged it as far as the Appian Way, and installed the statue in the temple of Mars, after beating the priests of that divinity for having dared to offer resistance. In other spots the crowd could be heard praying to Serapis, Baal, or Jehovah.

Here and there, also, there arose psalms chanted by men in the prime of life, by old men, by women, and by children; hymns solemn and unfamiliar; hymns of which the burden remained obscure, but in which the words "Behold the Judge cometh in the day of wrath and calamity" kept recurring.

Yet neither despair nor blasphemy nor hymns brought succour. The catastrophe seemed beyond restraint, complete, and inexorable, like Destiny. In the neighbourhood of the Amphitheatre some warehouses stocked with hemp, rope, and tar caught alight, and for several hours the whole of that part of the city behind which lay the Campus Martius was lit up with a glare so white that the spectators, half-swooning with terror, almost believed that, in the universal disaster, day had become confounded with night, and that their eyes were beholding the light of the sun. Presently, however, a steady, uniform outburst of flame, blood-red in colour, issued to eclipse every other tint assumed by the flames. From this last sea of fire there kept shooting heavenwards gigantic fountains and columns

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of incandescent material, which, opening out at the top into sheaves or tufted plumes, were seized by the wind, torn into golden threads or tails of sparks, and carried far over the country-side towards the Alban Hills. Every moment the night grew more charged with fire, until the air seemed saturated, not only with radiance, but with actual flame. The very Tiber rolled in billows of fire as the cataclysm extended its area, took the heights by assault, spread itself over the plain, and submerged the valleys beneath a frenzied, groaning, thundering tempest of destruction.

IV

THE weaver Macrinus, to whose house Vinicius had been carried, washed him, gave him clothes, and compelled him to take some nourishment. After recovering his strength a little, the young tribune announced his intention of resuming his search for Lygia; whereupon Macrinus, who was a Christian, confirmed Chilo's words by saying that Linus and the Archbishop Clement had gone to Ostrianum, where Peter was to baptise a number of converts. Also, Macrinus said that it was known to the Christians of the quarter that two days ago Linus had entrusted the care of his house to a certain Gaius.

"That means," said Vinicius to himself, "that neither Lygia nor Ursus was in the house when the fire broke out. They had gone to Ostrianum with Linus. To make twice daily the journey from the Trans-Tiberian quarter to the Porta Nomentana near Ostrianum would be beyond the old man's strength: consequently he must be lodging with some co-religionist outside the walls, and Lygia and Ursus are not likely to have left him."

In all this Vinicius discerned a manifest token of the favour of Christ. At Ostrianum he, Vinicius, would find Lygia, Linus, and Peter again, and carry them off to some far distant spot—perhaps to his own estate in Sicily. In a few days there would be left of Rome only a heap of cinders. What good, therefore, would be gained by facing out the catastrophe amid a populace in revolt when, in the country, and surrounded by a few faithful slaves, they could live peacefully under the protection of Christ and blessed by Peter? Ah, if only he could find them again, if only he could find them again!

By way of the Via Triumphalis it would be possible, if he followed the course of the river, to reach the Pons Æmilianus; and thence, by skirting the Pincian Hill and crossing

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the Campus Martius, the Gardens of Pompey, of Lucullus, and of Sallust, to penetrate to the Via Nomentana. Nevertheless, though this was the shortest route, Macrinus and Chilo advised another one. True, the fire had not yet taken in that part of the city, but the shops and streets of the district must be choked with people and their impedimenta. Chilo therefore proposed traversing the Campus Vaticanus as far as the Porta Flaminienſis, where they could cross the river, and then continue their way outside the walls, behind the Gardens of Acilius, to the Porta Salaria.

After a moment's hesitation Vinicius consented to follow this route; whereupon Macrinus, who was to remain behind to guard the house, procured his companions a pair of mules, which they could utilise later for Lygia's conveyance. Also he was for adding to the mules a slave, but Vinicius declined the latter with thanks, since he judged that, as before, he would be able to annex the first detachment of Prætorian Guards which he might encounter.

A moment later the pair had set out, *viâ* the Janiculate Hill, for the Via Triumphalis. There also, in open spaces, people were camping; but to force a way through the crowd was less difficult here, for the reason that the greater part of the inhabitants had fled towards the sea, by way of the Via Portuosa.

After passing through the Porta Septima, Vinicius and Chilo skirted the river and the splendid Gardens of Domitian, where the huge cypress-trees showed red in the glare of the conflagration as though in the light of the setting sun. The road had now become less encumbered, and it was only rarely that they had to struggle against an opposing current of peasants who were flocking towards the city. Vinicius urged on his mule, while Chilo followed behind him, soliloquising something after this fashion:

"Now we are leaving the fire behind us! Now it is warming our backs for us! Never before on this road have I known so much light at night time. O Zeus, if you do not send a flood to extinguish the fire it is clear that you have no love for Rome—even though it is a city before which Greece and the world have bowed. And now any Greek who might come along could roast his beans at its cinders! Who would have foreseen this? Henceforth there will be neither a Roman city nor Roman nobles! And those who may care to walk among its cooling ruins and whistle will be able to do so without fear! Ye immortal gods, to think of whistling among the remnants of a city which once ruled the universe! What Greek, what barbarian, would have imagined it? Yet either of them

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will be able to whistle as much as he likes; for a heap of cinders, whether it provide a fire for herdsmen or has been an illustrious city, is still a heap of cinders, and sooner or later the wind will deal with it."

As he spoke he kept turning to look at the fire, and contemplating the billows of flame with an expression of malicious delight. Presently he continued:

"Yes, it is blazing, it is blazing, that city! And soon the last trace of it will have disappeared from the face of the earth! Whither then will the universe send its grain and its oil and its fat money-bags? Who will squeeze out of Rome its gold and tears? Marble does not burn—true; but flame can cause it to crumble, and both the Capitol and the Palatine are falling to ruins. O Zeus, Rome was the shepherd, and other nations were the sheep. When the shepherd was hungry he would cut the throat of one of his flock, and eat the flesh of it, and offer unto you, O Father of the Gods, only the fleece. But, O Master of the Thunder-clouds, who will now wield the knife? Into whose hands will you deliver the shepherd's goad? Rome is burning, O Father, as surely as though you had fired it with your thunderbolts."

"Hurry, hurry!" put in Vinicius. "What are you doing there?"

"I am weeping for Rome, my lord," replied Chilo. "What an Olympian city it was!"

For a while they journeyed in silence as they listened to the roaring of the conflagration and the flutterings of innumerable birds which were winging their way through the night. The latter phenomenon was probably due to the fact that the pigeons which roosted in flocks around the villas and in the suburbs of Rome had, like the birds which hailed from the seashore and the neighbouring heights, mistaken the glare of the conflagration for the light of the sun, and, blinded by the unwonted brilliancy, were flying straight towards the flames.

Vinicius was the first to break the silence.

"Where were you," he asked, "when the fire broke out?"

"I was on my way to the house of my friend Euricius, who used to keep a shop near the Great Circus. Just as I was deep in meditation concerning the doctrine of Christ I heard a cry of 'Fire!' raised; and by the time the flames had involved the whole of the Circus and were beginning to spread I found it necessary to think of saving my skin."

"Did you see any persons throwing torches into the houses?"

"What did I *not* see, O grandson of Æneas? I saw men

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cutting their way through the crowd with swords, and fighting everywhere, and human bowels being cut out and trampled under foot. Had you yourself seen these things, you would have thought that the Barbarians had taken the city by storm, and were engaged in a massacre. Around me many folk howled with despair, but others there were who howled with joy; for in the world, my lord, there dwell numbers of people who cannot appreciate the benefits of your kindly dominion, nor the just laws by virtue of which you take everything for your own use. Never have men learnt to submit their will to that of the gods."

Vinicius was too profoundly plunged in thought to notice the irony of these remarks. Yet, though he had questioned Chilo fully a dozen times concerning everything that the latter could possibly know, he turned to him again.

"Then you saw the party at Ostrianum with your own eyes?" he inquired.

"Yes, I saw them with my own eyes, O son of Venus. I saw the maiden, the good Lygian, Saint Linus, and the Apostle Peter."

"Before the fire?"

"Before the fire, O Mithra."

Nevertheless a suspicion as to Chilo's veracity had dawned in Vinicius' mind. Stopping his mule, he eyed the old Greek with a menacing glance.

"What were you doing there?" he asked.

This disturbed Chilo. Like many others, he had been imagining that the destruction of Rome would bring about the end of the Roman dominion; but at this moment he found himself alone with Vinicius, and the terrible threats with which the latter had forbidden him to spy upon the Christians—particularly upon Lygia and Linus—suddenly recurred to his memory.

"My lord," he said, "why will you *never* believe that I love them? It was like this. I went to Ostrianum because I myself am half a Christian. Long ago Pyrrho taught me to prefer virtue to philosophy, and therefore I always attach myself to virtuous folk. Moreover, my lord, I am poor, and during your stay at Antium, O Jupiter, I frequently came near to perishing of hunger over my books; wherefore I took up my station under the walls of Ostrianum, for the reason that the Christians, through poor themselves, distribute more alms than do all the rest of the inhabitants of Rome put together."

This reason appeared to Vinicius sufficiently plausible, and he next inquired in a tone less severe:

"Then you know not where Linus has been lodging for the last few days?"

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"Once before, my lord," replied the Greek, "you punished me for my curiosity—you punished me cruelly."

Vinicius said nothing, and they continued on their way.

"My lord," resumed Chilo, "without my help you will never find the maiden again. But if you *do* find her, do not, I pray you, forget a sage who is in need."

"In that case I will give you a house and vineyard near Ameriola," replied Vinicius.

"I thank you, O Hercules! And with a vineyard attached? Again I thank you! Yes, yes—with a vineyard attached!"

By this time they were passing the slopes of the Vatican Hill, which were glowing red in the light of the fire. Beyond the Naumachia they turned to the right, with the object of traversing the Campus Martius, approaching and crossing the river, and making for the Porta Flaminensis. Suddenly Chilo pulled up short.

"My lord," he said, "I have an idea."

"What is it?"

"This. As yet no edict has been issued against the Christians, but the Jews have laid before the Prefect an information to the effect that the Christians cut the throats of children, worship an ass, and preach a doctrine which is not recognised by the Senate. Also, the Jews have been killing Christians, and stoning their houses with such ferocity that the sect has been forced to seek refuge from its assailants."

"Come to the point."

"It is this. The Jews' synagogues exist openly in the Trans-Tiberian quarter, whereas the Christians are obliged to pray in secret, and to assemble in ruined sheds outside the city, or even in the sandpits. Now, the Christians of the Trans-Tiberian region have chosen for this purpose the quarries whence building material was obtained for the Circus of Nero and the mansions which flank the river between the Janicline and Vatican Hills; and since the city is in flames, and the Christians will therefore have betaken themselves to prayer, we shall find a large number of them in their subterranean meeting-places. I advise you, therefore, to enter and see if this is so—more especially since it will not take us far out of our way."

"But you told me that Linus had gone to Ostrianum?" cried Vinicius impatiently.

"And you have promised me a house and vineyard at Ameriola," retorted Chilo. "Consequently I desire to search for the maiden wheresoever there be a chance of finding her. And find her we shall—in a quarry, engaged in prayer. Moreover, even if we should *not* find her there,

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we shall at least be able to gain some information concerning the party."

"Lead on," said Vinicius laconically.

At once Chilo turned to the left. For a moment the shoulder of the hill hid the conflagration from their view, and they proceeded on their way in darkness, although the surrounding heights were brilliantly illuminated. Skirting the Circus, they turned to the left again, and entered a narrow defile in which the obscurity was complete. Yet, despite the absence of light, Vinicius soon caught sight of clusters of twinkling lanterns.

"There they are!" cried Chilo.

"True," replied his companion. "And I can hear them singing."

It was so. From the windings of a dark retreat there came the sounds of a psalm, and the lanterns disappeared; but presently side passages revealed new forms moving, and Vinicius and Chilo found themselves surrounded by a whole group. Sliding from his mule, Chilo beckoned to a young lad who was walking beside them.

"I am a priest of Christ," he said, "in fact, a bishop. Take care of our mules for us, and you shall have my blessing, as well as a remission of all your sins."

The next moment they had entered the underground passage, and reached, through a tunnel dimly lighted by lanterns, a spacious excavation. There it was lighter than it had been in the tunnel, for the reason that, in addition to lanterns and candles, a few torches were helping to dispel the darkness. Before him Vinicius could see a crowd of people kneeling in prayer, but neither Lygia, the Apostle Peter, nor Linus. On some of the faces there was an expression of fear or of apprehension; on others an expression of hope. The whites of upturned eyes reflected the light of the torches, and on foreheads of a chalky whiteness the sweat was standing in beads. Some of the people were singing hymns, others were feverishly repeating the name of Jesus, and others were beating their breasts. All seemed to be expecting something at once instant and supernatural.

Suddenly the singing ceased, and above the assemblage, in a niche formed by the extraction of a huge block of stone, there appeared Crispus. His face looked haggard and pale. Every eye became turned in his direction, as though expecting words of consolation and hope; but, making towards the people the sign of the cross, he cried with an air of anger:

"Repent you of your sins, for the hour is come! Upon the city of crime and luxury, upon the new Babylon, has

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the Lord let loose a devouring flame! The hour of judgment, wrath, and destruction has sounded! The Lord has foretold His coming, and you are about to see Him! Yet He is coming, not as the Lamb sent to redeem your sins, but as a terrible judge who will execute justice, and cast into the abyss all sinners and unbelievers! For them all mercy is past! O Christ, I behold Thee! Already the stars are falling, the sun is becoming darkened, the earth is yawning, and the dead are rising from the tomb! And Thou, O Lord, art coming to the sound of the trump, and surrounded by Thy angels, in thunder and in lightning! O Christ, I behold Thee, I hear Thee!"

Raising his head, the speaker seemed to be gazing at something afar off and terrible. Suddenly the cavern re-echoed to the sound of a heavy explosion, which was followed by a second one, and then by a third. It meant that, in the city, whole streets of charred buildings were falling to pieces; but to the majority of the Christians the sounds appeared as a definite sign of the dread Day of Judgment. Terror of the Deity seized upon the assemblage, and many voices began to repeat: "The Day of Judgment is upon us! The Truth is at hand!" Some even buried their faces in their hands in the belief that the earth was about to quake to its foundations, and that from its gaping depths infernal beasts would rise, and fall upon sinners. Others cried out: "O Christ, have mercy upon us! O Redeemer, show us Thy compassion!" Others, again, began to confess their sins aloud, while yet others threw themselves into the arms of those nearest to them, so that, when the terrible moment came, they might feel a friendly heart beating against their breast. At the same time there were faces which bore upon them only an expression of celestial happiness—not a trace of terror. Such persons uttered, in unfamiliar dialects, words of ecstasy which passed man's understanding; while from an obscure corner of the cavern a man shouted: "Awake, thou that slumberest!"

Presently the voice of Crispus again overtopped the tumult, as he declaimed:

"Renounce you your earthly goods, for the earth is about to shrivel like a scroll! Renounce you your earthly loves, for the Lord will destroy all those who love their wives and their children better than they love Him! Woe unto those who shall choose the created of God rather than the Creator! Woe unto riches! Woe unto pomp! Woe unto the dissolute! Woe unto man and unto woman and unto child!"

At this moment an even heavier detonation shook the

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cavern, and instantly the whole assemblage fell with their faces to the earth, and their arms crossed (the latter a sign to ward off evil spirits). In the silence nothing was to be heard but panting ejaculations of "Jesus, Jesus, Jesus!" Here and there a child burst out crying. Then a quiet voice said:

"Peace be with you!"

It was the Apostle Peter, just entered.

At these words the panic disappeared as there disappears the panic of a flock of sheep before the coming of the shepherd. All rose to their feet, and those who were nearest to Peter clasped him by the knees, as though seeking shelter under the wings of a protecting angel. Stretching his arms over the anxious multitude, he continued:

"Wherefore are ye so terrified in your hearts? Which of you can foretell what is to come before it has done so and the hour has arrived? True, the Lord has chastised with fire the Babylon which has been making the world drunk with the wine of its furious prostitution; but to you who have been purified by baptism, to you whose sins have been redeemed by the Lamb, He will extend His compassion. Should you die, you will die with His name upon your lips. Peace be with you!"

Following upon Crispus' imprecations, this appeal of Peter's acted like balm upon the multitude. In place of terror of the Deity, love of God filled every soul. On every side there could be heard cries of "We are Thy sheep!" and those devotees who were nearest to Peter knelt at his feet, saying: "Abandon us not in the hour of our misfortune!"

As for Vinicius, he seized the hem of the Apostle's cloak, and said with bended head:

"Help me, O father! Everywhere through the fire and through the tumult have I sought Lygia, and nowhere can I find her; yet with all my heart I believe that you can restore her to my arms."

And the Apostle laid his hand upon Vinicius' head, and replied:

"Only have faith, and follow me."

V

STILL the city was burning. The Greek Circus had collapsed, and the wind, veering to the quarter of the sea, was blowing with demoniacal violence, and lashing the Cælian, Viminalian, and Esquiline Hills with flame, sparks, and glowing cinders.

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Nevertheless certain attempts at salvage had now been made, and three days after the outbreak of the fire Tigellinus—who had at length arrived from Antium—gave orders for some rows of houses on the Esquiline Hill to be demolished, in order that the conflagration, in default of further sustenance, might expire of itself, and so enable, however tardily, what little of the city still remained to be preserved.

Famine had made itself felt even before the close of the second day, for the huge reserves of provisions which had been stored in the city had been burnt, and no one had thought of laying in fresh supplies. Indeed, not until the arrival of Tigellinus were orders sent to Ostia to hasten the process of revictualment; and, meanwhile, the people took up a threatening attitude. From morning till night the house at Aqua Appia which Tigellinus was occupying was besieged by crowds of women, who shouted: "Give us bread and shelter!" In vain the Prætorian Guards who had come from the principal camp (between the Via Salaria and the Via Nomentana) endeavoured to preserve some semblance of order. In the front of the crowd they met with resistance from armed men, while, in the rear, unarmed citizens cried out: "We dare you to cut our throats in the presence of that fire!" Everywhere curses were heaped upon Cæsar; everywhere maledictions were showered upon the heads of the Augustans and the Prætorians. The unrest grew from hour to hour, and Tigellinus, as he contemplated, by night, the flames which had invested the city, felt as though he were beholding the camp-fire of an enemy.

The moment (it was then night time) that the first provisions arrived, the crowd broke down the principal doors of the Emporium on the side of the Aventine Hill, and possessed itself of the stores. By the light of the flames the mob fought with one another for bread; with the result that a large portion of the food got trampled under foot. Also, flour from sacks which had been slit open soon rendered the huge open space between the granaries and the Arch of Drusus and of Germanicus as white as snow. These scandalous scenes ceased only when the soldiers surrounded the warehouses, and attacked the crowd with weapons.

Never since the invasion of Brennus' Gauls had Rome suffered such a disaster. Yet on that occasion the Capitol had remained unharmed; whereas now it was the centre of a frightful ring of fire. By night, whenever the wind lifted the curtain of flames, one could see that the rows of columns in the upper temple of Jupiter had become red-hot.

It was said that, by Cæsar's orders, the provinces of Asia and Africa were to be stripped of their wealth, and the

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proceeds divided among the inhabitants of Rome in such a way that each man should be able to rebuild his dwelling. Yet also the news got about that the water in the aqueducts had been poisoned, and that Cæsar meant to destroy the city and annihilate its population, in order that he might migrate to Greece or to Egypt, and there reign over the whole universe. Rumours of this kind spread with astonishing rapidity; while the Christian belief that the world was destined to be destroyed by fire also found fresh adherents among those who had hitherto been faithful only to the pagan gods.

With the help of a section of the inhabitants, the soldiers continued to demolish houses in the Esquiline, Cælian, and Trans-Tiberian quarters; with the result that the latter were, in large part, saved. In the city itself, however, innumerable treasures which centuries of victorious conquest had accumulated became the prey of the flames. Works of art beyond price, temples, precious souvenirs of bygone Rome and Roman glory—all were destroyed.

In each letter that Tigellinus sent to Cæsar he implored his lord to return, and to appease, by his presence, his desperate people. But Nero only set out on the day when the flames reached the Domus Transitoria. Once started, he travelled by forced stages rather than run the risk of losing the moment when the destructive might of the conflagration should reach its highest development.

VI

THE flames had now invaded the Via Nomentana, and thence been turned aside by the wind towards the Via Lata and the Tiber — thus making a round of the Capitol, submerging the Forum Boarium, and destroying everything which, on their first outburst, they had spared. Even the Palatine was being threatened. Tigellinus called out the whole of the Prætorian Guards, and sent courier after courier to inform Cæsar that he would lose nothing of the splendour of the spectacle, seeing that the conflagration was again increasing; but Cæsar, though already *en route*, was unwilling to arrive save at night time, when the flames would be creating their greatest effect. Consequently he halted a while in the neighbourhood of Aqua Albana, and, after ordering the actor Aliturus to attend at his pavilion, set himself to study a posture, expression, gaze, and series of gestures suitable to the occasion, while discussing with the actor the question of whether, when saying, "O sacred

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city which didst seem to be more immovable than Mount Ida," he ought to raise his hands towards heaven, or whether, while holding in one of them a lyre, he ought to let it fall by his side while raising the other hand aloft. Again, in the poem which he had dedicated to the catastrophe, ought he (he made this inquiry of Petronius) to interpolate a few magnificent blasphemies addressed to the gods? From the point of view of pure art, would not such blasphemies issue spontaneously from the lips of a man who had lost his country?

At length, about midnight, he came in sight of the walls—he and his huge retinue of courtesans, senators, knights, freedmen, slaves, women, and children. Sixteen thousand Prætorian Guards, disposed in line of battle along the route, saw to the safety of his progress. As for the people, they cursed, shouted, and whistled at the sight of the procession, but dared not offer any actual violence. Here and there could be heard also the applause of those who, having nothing to lose, had lost nothing, but foresaw distributions of oil, grain, clothing, and money on a more generous scale than had hitherto been the case. However that might be, both hoots and applause were suddenly drowned by the fanfare of trumpets and horns which Tigellinus caused to be sounded. Nero, after passing through the Porta Ostiensis, stopped for a moment, and exclaimed:

"O shelterless sovereign of a houseless people, where, this night, shalt thou lay thy unfortunate head?"

Then, after traversing the Clivus Delphini, he ascended a specially constructed stairway to the Appian aqueduct—being accompanied to that vantage-point by his Augustans and a band of choristers, furnished with lutes and zithers.

Every man now held his breath in expectation of the august words which Nero was about to utter. Nevertheless he stood there without speaking—his face fixed and solemn, a robe of purple gracing his shoulders, and his eyes intent upon the furious spectacle of the flames. At length, when Terpnos offered him his lute, he raised his eyes to the fire-burnished heavens, as though expecting inspiration to descend thence.

From a distance the people could discern their Emperor as he stood there in the glare of the ruddy glow. Below, the flaming serpents hissed and crackled, and the remnants of sacred and profane buildings flared to heaven. Here blazed the temple of Hercules which Evander had built; there the temple of Jupiter Stator, the temple of Luna, which dated from before the time of Servius Tullius, the palace of Numa Pompilius, and the sanctuary of Vesta, with the household gods of the Roman people; while at

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intervals the Capitol also showed through the fringe of fire which surrounded it. The whole past of Rome was burning: and he, Cæsar, stood there—a lute in his hand, and the mask of a tragic actor on his face! Not a thought did he give to the mother-city which was being consumed: all that he had in his mind was how to strike a pose, and to utter words, which should be in keeping with the grandeur of the calamity.

He hated that city, he hated that people. He loved only his own singing and his own verse-making. And in his heart of hearts he was rejoicing at having at length beheld a genuine tragedy. What more could he desire? Rome, the sovereign city of the world, was on fire; and he, Cæsar, a gilded lute in his hands, was standing posed upon the arches of the aqueduct—a figure visible from every point of the compass—clad in purple, pathetic. Far below him, in the darkness, murmuring and seething, was massed the people. And how it murmured! Ages might pass, thousands of years might sink into the abyss of time, yet century upon century would glorify the poet who, on that sublime night, had sung the burning and the fall of Troy! Homer, indeed? What was *he* as compared with Cæsar? What was even Apollo, despite his hollow lute?

Cæsar raised his hands, and, striking the strings, uttered the words of Priam:

“Home of my fathers, cradle so dear to my heart!”

Heard in the open air, amid the crashing of the fire and the murmuring of the mob, his voice sounded strangely weak, and the thrumming of the lute like the drone of some small insect. Nevertheless, as Cæsar intoned the line, all the senators, officials, and Augustans present bent their heads before him, and appeared to listen in silent rapture. For a long while he went on singing, and merging gradually into a note of sadness; until finally, when he was forced to stop for want of breath, the choristers took up the lay, and finished it. Then Nero, with a gesture which Aliturus had taught him, resumed his tragic syrma or actor's robe, struck a chord upon the lute, and again plunged into song.

This concluded, he set himself to *improvise* a lay—seeking in the picture which lay before his eyes the finest metaphors possible. Little by little his face changed in expression. The destruction of his native city had moved him not at all: yet so drunk was he with his own pathos that his eyes filled with tears. At last he relinquished the lute (which fell tinkling at his feet), and, draping himself again in the syrma, stood as though turned to stone, like one of the Niobes which adorned the courtyard of the Palatine.

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A storm of applause broke the silence. But from the crowd below he received his answer in the form of a storm of hoots. Down among the mob there was not a soul who any longer doubted that the town had been fired by Cæsar's orders, so that he might enjoy the spectacle, and sing his hymns. On hearing the clamour raised by hundreds of thousands of throats, Nero turned towards his Augustans with the sad smile of a man who is receiving cruel and unjust treatment.

"See," he said, "how the Quirites appreciate me, and how they show their taste for my poetry!"

"The rascals!" replied Vatinius. "Pray order the Prætorian Guards to charge them."

Upon this Nero turned to Tigellinus.

"Can I count upon the fidelity of the soldiers?" he inquired.

"Yes, O divinity," replied the Prefect.

Petronius, however, shrugged his shoulders.

"You can count upon their fidelity," he remarked, "but not upon their numbers. Remain where you are, for here you will be safest. At all costs must the people be appeased."

Seneca was of the same opinion, as well as the Consul Licinius, for the agitation below was growing more and more aggressive—the people were arming themselves with stones, tent-pegs, planks broken from chariots and wheelbarrows, and every sort of old iron implement that they could lay their hands upon. Presently certain officers of the Guards arrived to report that, under pressure of the mob, the Prætorian Guards were experiencing the greatest possible difficulty in holding their ground, and that, having had no orders to assume the offensive, they knew not what to do.

"Ye immortal gods!" cried Nero. "What a night! On the one side of me the fire, and on the other side the unchained billows of the populace!"

With that he set himself to search for words to express, in splendid form, the dangers of the hour; until, seeing around him only pale faces and anxious eyes, he too began to be afraid.

"Bring me my dark mantle and a hood," he commanded. "Are we going to end things with a battle?"

"My lord," replied Tigellinus uneasily, "I have done all that lay in my power, but the danger is growing greater. Speak to them, my lord—speak to your people, and hold out to them promises."

"What? Cæsar speak to the plebs? Let some one else speak in my name. Who will undertake the commission?"

"I will," said Petronius calmly.

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"Then do so, my friend. Under all difficulties are you my most trusty servant. Go to the people, and spare not the promises."

Petronius turned to the bystanders, and his face looked careless and ironical.

"The senators who are present," he said, "will follow me, and also Piso, Senecio, and Nerva."

Then he slowly descended the ladder which led down from the aqueduct; and, after hesitating for a moment, those whom he had named followed him, reassured by his insouciance.

Halting at the foot of the arches, Petronius called for his white charger, mounted it, and, attended by his companions, directed his way through the serried ranks of the Prætorians towards the centre of the howling mob. Not a weapon had he on his person—morely a small ivory wand which he was in the habit of carrying.

When he had reached the thick of the crowd he forced his horse into its depths. Around him, by the light of the fire, could be seen armed hands, bloodshot eyes, perspiring faces, and lips covered with foam and vomiting abuse. The sea of disorder closed around the little party of patricians—a sea which, at a distance, looked like the ocean in a storm.

The clamour grew, and merged into a roar that was scarcely human. Pikes, pitchforks, and swords whirled around Petronius' head, and violent hands stretched out to seize him and the reins of his horse. Yet still he continued on his way, calm and disdainful.

Sometimes he would strike with his wand the boldest of the mob, as though he were cleaving a passage through a peaceable throng of citizens: and this coolness made a certain impression upon the populace.

At last the people began to acclaim him, and numerous voices cried out:

"It is Petronius! It is the Arbiter of Fashion!"

"Yes, it is Petronius!" came in echoes from every side.

In proportion as his name spread, faces became less ferocious, and abuse less bestial.

Raising the lappet of his scarlet-bordered toga, he turned it in the air, as a signal that he was about to speak.

"Silence, silence!" called several of the mob; and instantly there was a hush. Raising himself in his saddle, Petronius spoke as follows in his full-throated accents:

"Citizens, let those who hear what I say repeat my words to their neighbours; and let all who are present bear themselves like men, and not like beasts in the arena."

The mob shouted assent.

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"Then listen. The city will be rebuilt, and meanwhile the Gardens of Lucullus, of Mæcenas, of Cæsar, and of Agrippina will be open to you. To-morrow will begin a distribution of grain, wine, and oil, so that each man may fill his belly to the full. Also, Cæsar will provide you with such games as the world has never seen; and during them he will offer you also banquets, and bestow upon you his bounty. Then will you be richer than you were before the fire."

In answer there came a murmur which grew as grow ripples of water into which a stone has been cast. Those who were nearest to Petronius repeated his words to those who were further off; and the cries of anger or of approbation which arose here and there soon merged into a unanimous shout of "Bread, and games in the Circus!"

Meanwhile Petronius, draped in his white toga, sat motionless on his horse. From every side the shouting was becoming stronger and deeper in tone. Yet the fact that Cæsar's emissary had not taken his departure showed that still he had something to say.

At length, beckoning for silence with outstretched hand, he cried:

"Since I have promised you bread and games, applaud now the Cæsar who is to feed and clothe you. Then retire to rest, good people, for the dawn is about to break."

Having thus spoken, he turned his horse about, and, tapping lightly on the head or face those who barred his way, he returned slowly to the ranks of the Prætorians.

Above, on the aqueduct, the cry of "Bread and games!" had failed to be understood. It had been taken for another outburst of fury. Indeed, no one thought to see Petronius return. As soon, therefore, as Cæsar perceived him ascending the steps of the ladder, he ran to meet him.

"What is going on down there?" he inquired. "Are the people fighting with one another?"

Petronius drew a deep breath.

"By Pollux," he exclaimed, "how the people stink and sweat! Let some one give me a restorative, for I feel ready to faint."

Then he turned to Cæsar.

"I promised them," he continued, "grain and wine and oil and games and admittance to the Gardens. Consequently they are once more adoring you, and straining their cracked lips in your honour. Ye immortal gods, but the musty odour of that mob is disgusting!"

"The Prætorians were fully prepared," put in Tigellinus; "and, had not Petronius appeased the people, those brawlers down there should have been put to silence for

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ever. What a pity, O Cæsar, that you did not permit me to employ force!"

Petronius looked at him for a moment, shrugged his shoulders, and said:

"You have lost nothing. Perhaps you will have to employ it to-morrow."

"No, no!" cried Cæsar. "I will have the Gardens thrown open, and grain distributed. I thank you, Petronius. Yes, I will give the people games, and sing in public this hymn which I have sung to you in private."

So saying, he laid his hand upon Petronius' shoulder, and, after a pause, inquired:

"Tell me truly: how did I look to-night?"

"You looked worthy of the spectacle; even as the spectacle looked worthy of you," replied Petronius. Then he turned towards the fire, and added:

"Let us once more contemplate the city, and bid farewell to ancient Rome."

VII

THE Apostle's words restored confidence to the minds of the Christians, and, one by one, they left the catacomb, and returned to their temporary dwellings. Some even set out for the Trans-Tiberian quarter, since the news was circulating that the veering of the wind towards the river had caused the fire to cease spreading.

Peter, with Vinicius and Chilo, also left the cavern. As they did so men came forward to kiss the Apostle's hands; mothers held up to him their children; other women went down upon their knees in the dark tunnel-way, and, raising their lanterns, implored his benediction; yet others followed in his train, singing hymns. The moment was not a propitious one for proffering requests; but after reaching a clearer space than the tunnel afforded—a spot whence the blazing city was visible, the Apostle thrice made the sign of the cross towards Rome, and then turned to Vinicius with the words:

"Fear not. The quarryman's hut where we shall find Lygia, with Linus and their faithful servant, is not far from here. Christ, who has given her into your keeping, has also preserved her for you."

On hearing this, Vinicius was seized with such a faintness that he fell at the Apostle's feet, and, clasping his knees, remained thus—motionless, incapable of uttering a word. But the Apostle, deprecating the young man's gratitude and homage, exclaimed:

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"Nay; kneel not unto me, but unto Christ."

"What a noble God is yours!" put in Chilo behind them.

"Yet what I am to do with the mules which are waiting for us I know not."

"Rise and follow me," said Peter, taking the young tribune by the hand.

Chilo repeated:

"My lord, what am I to do with the mules which are waiting for us? Perhaps this honourable prophet would prefer to ride one of them, instead of proceeding on foot?"

"You can return with the mules to Macrinus' house," at length commanded Vinicius.

"Pardon me, my lord, if I remind you of the house at Ameriola. Under the present terrible circumstances one might easily forget a little matter of that kind."

"You shall have the house."

"O grandson of Numa Pompilius, I felt sure that I shall. Also, now that this magnanimous Apostle has witnessed your promise, I know that I need not recall to your mind the fact that you have also apportioned me a vineyard. Peace be with you! I shall see you again, my lord. Meanwhile, peace be with you!"

"And with you!"

Turning to the right, towards the sandhills, they set forth. As they went Vinicius said to Peter:

"Master, I pray you wash me in the water of baptism, in order that I may be able to call myself a true member of Christ, whom I love with my whole heart. Likewise, baptise me without delay, since I feel that my soul is prepared for it. Everything that Christ may bid me do I will perform; and you, I know, will tell me what more there is that I can do."

"You must love mankind as you love your own brethren," replied the Apostle. "Only through love can you serve Him."

"Yes, I understand that, I feel that. When I was a youth I used to believe in the gods of Rome, but never to love them; whereas for Him, the Only God, I would lay down my life."

"And He will bless thee—thou and thy house together," responded the Apostle.

The quarryman's hut was, in reality, a sort of cave, hollowed out in a buttress of rock, and enclosed by a thatched wall of clay. The door was shut, but through an opening which served as a window the interior was visible in the firelight. As the newcomers approached, a gigantic form rose to meet them, and demanded their identity.

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“We are servants of Christ,” replied Peter. “Peace be with you, Urban!”

Instantly Ursus bowed before the Apostle, and then, recognising Vinicius, seized his hand in his gigantic fist, and carried it to his lips.

“You too, my lord!” he exclaimed. “Blessed be the name of the Lamb for the joy that this will bring to Callina!”

The door having been opened, they entered, and found the ailing Linus stretched upon a bed of straw—his features emaciated, and his forehead the colour of yellow ivory. Near the hearth was seated also Lygia, holding in her hand a string of small fishes which were destined to furnish the evening meal. So busy was she in unstringing them, as well as so sure that the newcomer was only Ursus, that she did not move. Vinicius approached her, and, calling her by name, held out to her his arms. Instantly she rose, a flash of astonishment and joy passed over her face, and, without a word, like a child which, after days of terror, has recovered its father or its mother, she rushed into the young man’s arms. He clasped and clasped her to his breast; after which, taking her head in his hands, he covered her eyes and forehead with kisses.

At length he was able to relate the story of his departure from Antium, of his arrival in Rome, of how he had searched for her in Linus’ house, and of how he had suffered until the Apostle had told him where she was.

“But now,” said he, “now that I have found you again—I shall not leave you here. No, I will save you, and save all who are with you. Will you come with me to Antium, dearest? Thence we will embark for Sicily, for my lands are your lands, and my houses your houses. In Sicily we will seek out the Aulus family, and I will restore you to Pomponia, and receive you from her hands. You are not afraid of me, are you, my beloved? True, I have not yet been washed in the water of baptism, but Peter will bear me out that I have begged for baptism at his hands. Do you and all who are here have confidence in me.”

Lygia listened with a radiant countenance. The departure for Sicily would open up a new era of happiness in their life. Had Vinicius proposed to take her alone, she would probably have resisted the temptation, since she was unwilling to leave Linus and the Apostle; but Vinicius had said, “Come with me, *all* of you, for my lands are your lands, and my houses your houses.”

She bent her head to kiss his hand, and said:

“Your home shall be my home.”

Then, in confusion at having uttered the formula of

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betrothal, she blushed hotly, and stood motionless in the fire-light. Vinicius turned to Peter.

"Rome is burning by Cæsar's orders," he said. "Who knows, therefore, that he will not proceed to loose his soldiers at the people's throats? And who knows that, after the fire, there will not come other calamities—civil war, famine, outlawry, assassination? Hide you, therefore, and let us hide Lygia. In Sicily you can await the end of the storm in peace, and return later to sow the good seed."

At this moment, as though in confirmation of Vinicius' apprehensions, there came from the direction of the Vatican Hill confused shouts of rage and fear. Almost at the same moment the quarryman rushed into the hut, crying as he shut the door:

"People are being massacred near the Circus of Nero! The slaves and the gladiators have attacked the citizens!"

"You hear what he says," commented Vinicius.

"The measure is full," said the Apostle, "and the calamities which are to come will be as the sea—unfathomable, and without limit."

To Vinicius he added as he pointed to Lygia:

"Take you this child whom God has given unto you, and save her. Linus, who is ill, will follow you with Ursus."

But Vinicius, who had conceived for the Apostle a love which consorted with his impetuous soul, cried:

"Master, I swear that I will not leave you here to perish!"

"May the Lord bless you for what you would propose to do," replied Peter. "Yet know you not that three times, by the Sea of Galilee, Christ said to me, 'Feed my sheep'? Now, if you unto whom the care of me has not been given can refuse to leave me here to perish, how much less can I abandon my flock in the hour of danger? When the storm was raging over the Sea, and fear had come upon our hearts, *He* did not abandon us. How, therefore, can I, His servant, refuse to follow the example of Him, my Master?"

Then Linus raised his sunken face, and said:

"Vicar of Christ, how can *I* refuse to follow *your* example?"

Struggling with his thoughts, Vinicius passed his hand over his forehead. Suddenly he seized Lygia by the hand, and said in a voice which vibrated with the energy of a Roman soldier:

"Listen to me, Peter, Linus, and Lygia. What I said just now was what human reason dictated to me to say; but the reason which *you* follow in your souls answers only

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to the dictates of the Saviour. Yes, I had not fully understood that, I was labouring under an error, for the scales have not fallen from my eyes, and my former nature is not yet wholly dead in me. Nevertheless I love Christ, and desire to be His servant; and although, for me, the matter touches something which is more precious to me than my own life, I hereby kneel to you and swear that I too will fulfil the commandment of love, and abandon not my brethren in the hour of misfortune."

So saying, he fell upon his knees, and raising his hands aloft, cried in accents of enthusiasm:

"O Christ, have I comprehended Thee at last? Am I at last worthy of Thee?"

His hands were trembling, his eyes shining with tears, and his limbs quivering with love and faith. Peter took an earthenware jar, and, approaching the young man, said solemnly:

"I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen."

Then, for all who were present, the hut became, in their religious rapture, radiant with miraculous light. Celestial music greeted their ears, the rocks of the cavern parted over their heads, and a company of angels could be seen descending from Heaven. . . . Yes, and far above them, in the zenith, they could see also a Cross set, and two hands which had been pierced bestowing a benediction.

Without there came to their ears the sounds of men fighting.

VIII

THE people were camping out in the splendid Imperial Gardens which had formerly belonged to Domitian and Agrippina, as well as on the Campus Martius and in the Gardens of Pompey, of Sallust, and of Mæcenæ. There they had taken up their abode in porticoes, in buildings devoted to the game of tennis, in luxurious summer villas, and in sheds which, until lately, had been tenanted by zoological specimens (the latter, comprising peacocks, flamingos, swans, ostriches, gazelles, antelopes, stags, and roedeer, had perished under the knives of the mob). From Ostia provisions had been brought in such quantities that one could have walked across the assembled boats and barges, as across a bridge which spanned the Tiber; and from these vessels grain was sold at the unprecedented price of three sestertii, as well as given away gratis to the poorer folk. Also, immense stocks of wine, oil, and chest-

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nuts had been requisitioned, while from the hill country there arrived daily consignments of cattle and sheep. Indeed, the needy population of the Trans-Tiberian quarter lived better now than they had done before the fire, and famine had been definitely averted. On the other hand, it was not easy to prevent brigandage, pillage, and other abuses, since the nomad life of the people afforded robbers impunity; and the more so in view of the fact that they made great boast of their admiration for Cæsar, and never failed to applaud him wherever he showed himself. Moreover, inasmuch as the situation of affairs caused all civil functions to be suspended, while the army was insufficient to ensure the preservation of order, every night witnessed brawls, assassinations, and acts of rape. In particular, around the Porta Mugiona, where the flocks and herds arriving from the Campania were accustomed to halt, skirmishes took place in which hundreds of men were killed, and of which the result was to cover the banks of the Tiber with unburied corpses. This gave rise to the formation of pestilential odours, and so to outbreaks of epidemic sickness which the timid foretold would increase to the dimensions of a plague.

On the sixth day from its inception the conflagration reached some open spaces on the Esquiline Hill, and began to die down. Yet still the masses of cinders and burning *débris* glowed with a glare so brilliant that the people refused to believe that the end of the disaster was approaching. In fact, during the night of the seventh day there did actually take place a revival of the fire, in some buildings belonging to Tigellinus; but since it found little material to feed upon, its duration was brief.

Here and there a group of charred houses would crash to earth, and, in so doing, emit wreaths of flame and showers of sparks; but gradually, for all that sporadic outbreaks occurred, the ruins of these edifices soon grew black and cold after they had once become levelled with the ground. Only after dark did blue tongues of flame dance upon the charred embers which littered the great lonely area cleared by the fire. That area comprised ten of the fourteen quarters of which Rome had formerly been composed; and of the four survivors the Trans-Tiberian region was one. When, at length, the great heaps of calcined *débris* had dulled their radiance, the space between the river and the Esquiline Hill presented a vast expanse of solitude, gloom, and death in which only rows of tall chimneys, like funeral columns, remained erect.

By day there would wander around those columns sad groups of people whose object it was to search the ashes for

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chattels which had been dear to them, or for the bones of well-beloved relatives; while by night only dogs howled over the great ruined, calcined waste.

Cæsar's generosity did not altogether put a stop to the public indignation. The only people who were really satisfied were thieves and vagabonds, since they could now eat and drink their fill, and also pillage without restraint. Every one else—the folk who had lost their dear ones, and those whose all had been destroyed—refused to be appeased by the throwing open of the Gardens, or by the distributions of grain, or by the prospect of games and largesses.

Consequently even the base flatteries of his Court, added to Tigellinus' lies, could not prevent Nero from apprehending that, in the merciless, inexorable struggle of patricians and Senate with the people, the latter would one day turn the scale. Nor were the Augustans themselves feeling altogether easy in their minds. Tigellinus kept dreaming of bringing over fresh legions from Asia Minor; Vatinius, who had hitherto laughed at rebuffs, had lost his good humour; and Vitellius had ceased even to care for food. As for the rest, they were for ever taking counsel together as to the best means of averting the threatened danger, since it was an open secret that, should a revolt remove Cæsar from the throne, no single one of them would find his life safe, unless it were Petronius. Tigellinus held consultations with Domitius Afer, and even with Seneca (whom he hated); Poppæa, who had no doubt that the fall of Nero would entail her own death sentence, closeted herself with her intimates and the Hebrew Rabbis (it was known that for years past she had professed the Jewish religion); and Nero kept proposing expedients of his own invention—expedients frequently atrocious, but more often absurd.

At length a council was held in the palace of Tiberius, which building the fire had spared. Petronius' advice to Nero was to escape the present trouble by departing for Greece, and thence for Egypt and Asia Minor. The expedition had long been planned, said Petronius, and what good could come of further postponement? Cæsar seemed to be much taken with the idea, but Seneca objected.

"It would be easy enough for us to *go*," he remarked, "but not so easy for us to *return*."

"To return?" cried Petronius. "Why, if need be, we should return at the head of the Asiatic legions."

"That is what I intend to do," added Nero.

Once more Petronius appeared master of the situation.

"Listen to me, Cæsar," put in Tigellinus. "Petronius' plan would bring disaster upon us all. Before you could

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reach Ostia civil war would have broken out; and who knows but that some collateral descendant of Augustus would then be proclaimed Emperor? "

" Well, well," said Nero, " let us act so that no descendants of Augustus may come to hand in the market. There are not many of them alive; and the few so alive could easily be got rid of."

" Yes, easily enough, no doubt; yet others there are who might prove a danger. Yesterday my soldiers heard persons in the crowd saying that a man like Thræseas ought to be Emperor."

Nero bit his lips.

" The insatiable, the ungrateful mob! " he exclaimed. " They have grain in abundance now, and abundance of hot ashes wherein to bake their cakes. What more do they desire? "

" They desire vengeance," replied Tigellinus.

No one spoke. Only Cæsar rose, raised his hand, and improvised the words:

" Hearts are hungry for vengeance; and vengeance also craves
Its meed of victims."

Then, forgetting everything else, he cried with a radiant countenance:

" Bring me tablets and a stylus, that I may make a note of that couplet. Never has Lucan composed one equal to it. Did you notice how instantly it occurred to my mind? "

" Yes, incomparable poet! " came a general cry of assent.

Nero jotted down the impromptu, and then continued as he walked up and down and eyed those present:

" Yes, vengeance craves its meed of victims. Suppose we were to have it set about that Vatinius fired the city, and to sacrifice him to the fury of the people? "

" But who am I that I should be so honoured, my lord? " cried Vatinius.

" True. We have need of some one more important. How about Vitellius? "

The latter turned pale, although he affected to laugh.

" My fat alone," he objected, " would give rise to a new conflagration."

However, Cæsar desired to find a victim who would *really* assuage the anger of the mob. And he found one.

" Tigellinus," he said, " it was you who fired Rome."

All present shuddered: for at length they understood that Cæsar was not jesting, and that the hour was heavy with possibilities.

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At the words Tigellinus' face contracted like the jawl of a dog which is making ready to bite.

"I fired Rome," he said slowly, "*by your orders.*"

For a moment or two the antagonists stood eyeing one another; and amid the stillness there could be heard the buzzing of flies in the atrium.

"Tigellinus," at last inquired Nero, "do you love me?"

"You know that I do, my lord."

"Then sacrifice yourself for my sake."

"Divine Cæsar," replied Tigellinus, "why hold out to me the alluring draught, when it is forbidden my lips to touch it? The people are murmuring, and are ready to revolt. Would you that the Prætorians also should rise?"

Tigellinus was Prefect of the latter, and his words implied a threat. Nero understood this, and his face turned livid.

At the same moment there entered Epaphrodite, one of Cæsar's freedmen. He had come to inform Tigellinus that the divine Augusta desired to see him, since she had with her some persons with whom the Prefect ought to have speech.

Tigellinus bowed to Cæsar, and went out reassured. At the moment when he had been on the point of being assailed he had shown his teeth, and Cæsar had played the coward.

Nero remained awhile without speaking. Then, perceiving that his retinue were hanging upon his lips, he said:

"I have nourished a viper in my bosom!"

Petronius shrugged his shoulders, as though to indicate that it would not be a very difficult matter to scotch such a viper.

"Well, speak, and give me your advice," cried Nero. "In you alone have I confidence, for you have more sense than the others, and I know that you love me."

Petronius had it at the tip of his tongue to say, "Make me Prefect of your Prætorian Guards, and then I will deliver Tigellinus over to the people, and appease the city within twenty-four hours"; but his native slothfulness was too much for him. To be Prefect would mean taking upon his shoulders the care of Cæsar's person and the weight of thousands of public affairs. What would that benefit him? Was it not better to read books, and to admire vases and statuary, and to enjoy the body of the divine Eunice?

So he replied:

"My advice to you is to leave for Greece."

"Ah!" cried Nero, disappointed. "I was expecting something better than that. If I were to depart, who could guarantee that the Senate, which hates me, would not proclaim another Emperor? Once upon a time I could trust the people; but now they turn against me. By

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Hades, but if only that Senate and that people had but a single head!"

"Permit me to tell you, my lord, that if you desire to preserve Rome you must also preserve some Romans," said Petronius with a smile.

Nero whimpered.

"What do Rome or the Romans matter?" he said. "In Greece men would listen to me, whereas here I see nothing around me but treason. All leave me to my own devices, and even you are prepared to play the traitor. Yes, I know it, I know it. You have no idea how posterity will grudge you the fact that you abandoned an artist like myself."

Suddenly he struck his forehead with his hand.

"True!" he ejaculated. "Amid these cares I, at times, forget who I am."

He turned to Petronius a face which appeared to have recovered its serenity.

"Petronius," he continued, "the populace are murmuring; but if I were to take my lute, and to go to the Campus Martius and sing to the people the hymn which I sang to yourselves during the fire, do you think that I should succeed in charming them with my song, even as Orpheus charmed brute beasts?"

Upon this Tullius Senecio, who was impatient to return to some slave-girls which he had had brought from Antium, put in:

"Incontestably, Cæsar—provided that they suffer you to begin."

"Ah! Then let us start for Greece," cried Cæsar in disgust.

At this moment Poppæa entered the room with Tigellinus. The latter, looking prouder than any triumphant general ascending the steps of the Capitol, planted himself before Cæsar, and said slowly, but distinctly, and with a steely ring in his tones:

"Listen to me, Cæsar. I have thought out a plan. The people are thirsting for vengeance, and desire a victim—nay, rather, hundreds and thousands of victims. Have you heard speak of the Christ whom Pontius Pilate caused to be crucified? Do you know who the Christians are? Have I not spoken to you of their crimes, and of their infamous rites? Have I not mentioned their prophets, who foretell that the world is to perish by fire? Well, the people hate and suspect these Christians. No one has ever seen them in our temples, for they pretend that our gods are evil spirits. No one has ever seen them in the Stadium, for they despise chariot-racing. Never has a Christian's

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hands accorded you applause; never has a Christian's lips acknowledged your divine origin. They are the enemies of the human race, the enemies of the city, and the enemies of yourself. The people are murmuring against you: yet it was not you, Cæsar, who bid me burn Rome, nor I who burnt it. The people are hungry for vengeance. Let them, therefore, drink of it. The people are yearning for games and blood. Let them, therefore, realise their desire. The people are suspicious of you. Let their suspicions, therefore, be turned aside."

Whilst Tigellinus had been speaking the Imperial mask had been constantly changing its expression—reflecting, in turn, fury, disappointment, commiseration, and disapproval. Then suddenly, straightening himself, Cæsar raised his hands to heaven, and remained in that posture without speaking. At length he said in the tone of a tragic actor:

"O Zeus, Apollo, Hera, Athene, Persephone, and ye other immortal gods, wherefore did you not come to our aid? What has this unfortunate city done to these fanatics that they should have set it on fire?"

"They are the enemies of the human race and of you," put in Poppæa.

Upon this followed a general cry of "Justice, justice! Punish the incendiaries! The gods themselves are demanding vengeance!"

Nero seated himself, and remained silent and drooping, as though dumfounded by the spectacle of the Christian abomination. At length he raised his hands again, and exclaimed:

"What punishments, what tortures, could be meet for such a crime? Nevertheless the gods will inspire me, and with the aid of the powers of Tartarus I will provide my poor people with such a spectacle that for centuries to come the Romans will speak of me with gratitude!"

At once across Petronius' mind there flashed the thought of the dangers which would be incurred by Lygia and Vinicius, whom he loved, and by the people whose doctrine he had rejected, but whom he knew to be innocent. Also he thought of the bloody orgies which would soon begin—the kind of orgies which were abhorrent to the eye of an æsthete. But above all other considerations rose the reflection, "I must save Vinicius and the maiden, for he would go mad if the latter were to perish." That consideration dwarfed all the rest, even though Petronius was aware that he was undertaking a very dangerous part.

With that careless indifference which it was ever his habit to assume when criticising or making fun of the absurd suggestions of Cæsar or of the Augustans, he said:

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"So you have found your victims! Very good. You can now send them into the arena, and clothe them in the shift of the condemned. Yet listen to me. You have at your back authority, you have at your back the Prætorian Guards, you have at your back force. Be sincere, therefore—and the more so since no one is listening. Deride the people if you like, but do not lie to your own consciences. Deliver the Christians to the people, and punish them, but at least have the courage to say that it was not they who fired Rome. Fie, then! You call me 'The Arbiter of Fashion.' Very well. In that capacity I tell you that I will not countenance these miserable comedies. They remind me too much of the booth-theatres at the Porta Asinaria, where actors play kings and gods for the amusement of the street loungers, and, when the farce is over, either oil their gills with a draught of sour wine or get hissed out of the place. Be you *true* kings and gods if you must be anything: for once more I tell you that you are in a position to do so. You, Cæsar, have spoken to us of posterity; but reflect well what sentence posterity may pass upon you. 'By the divine Clio,' it may say, 'but Nero—Nero, the master of the world, Nero, the god—burnt Rome to the ground, for he was as powerful on earth as is Zeus on Olympus!' 'Nero the poet,' again it may say, 'loved poetry so greatly that to poetry he sacrificed his country! Never since the beginning of the world had any one done, had any one dared to think of doing, such a thing!' Yes, in the name of the Nine Libethrides¹ I adjure you not to renounce that glory—a glory which will cause you to be sung in hymns until the ages have rolled away. Compared with you, what would Priam or Agamemnon or Achilles be like? How could the gods themselves hold a candle to you? Whether the burning of Rome has been a good thing or a bad thing matters little. The point is that it has been a great thing, and a thing out of the common. Moreover, I swear that the people would not raise a hand against you. Take your courage in your two hands. Refrain from committing acts unworthy of yourself, for your only fear need be lest posterity should say of you: 'Nero burnt Rome, but he had the pusillanimity of a poet, for he disavowed his great deed, and, like a coward, laid the blame upon those who were innocent.' "

Concerning the possible consequences which the failure of the desperate method which he was employing might entail Petronius laboured under no delusion; but the game of fortune and chance had always diverted him.

"The dice have been thrown," he said to himself, "and

¹ Muses.

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now we shall see which will win the day in this monkey's soul—whether fear for his own skin or love of 'glory.' " At bottom Petronius had no doubt but that, despite everything, fear would prove the stronger.

The silence soon became oppressive. Nero had drawn back his lips until they were almost touching the nostrils—a grimace which, with him, indicated indecision.

"My lord," cried Tigellinus, "permit me to leave the room in which I have heard you urged to risk your person amid the greatest dangers, and in which I have heard you called a pusillanimous Cæsar, a cowardly poet, an incendiary, and a comedian. My ears will not suffer me to hear more."

"I have lost!" thought Petronius to himself.

Nevertheless, turning to Tigellinus, and measuring him with a glance which revealed his contempt for the rascal, he added aloud:

"Tigellinus, it is *you* whom I have been calling a comedian, for you *are* one—yes, even at this very moment."

"Merely because I decline to listen to your insults?"

"No; but because you feign a boundless love for Cæsar, although a moment ago you were threatening him with your Prætorians—which hint we all of us understood, not excluding Cæsar himself."

Tigellinus, who had never expected that Petronius would dare to throw so bold a cast upon the table, turned pale, and remained silent. Yet this was destined to be the last victory gained by the "Arbiter of Fashion" over his rival, for at the same moment Poppæa cried:

"My lord, how could you permit such a thought to enter any one's head—or at least permit any one to give it utterance in your presence?"

"Yes; punish the insulter," added Vitellius.

Again Nero wrinkled his jowl, and said as he turned to Petronius with glittering eyes:

"Is it thus that you requite the friendship which I have always had for you?"

"If I am wrong, pray prove me to be so," replied Petronius. "Yet rest assured that what I have said has been dictated solely by my affection for yourself."

"Punish the insulter," again exclaimed Vitellius; and a chorus of assent followed his words.

All now drew away from Petronius. Even Tullius Senecio, his old companion at Court, and young Nerva, who had hitherto shown him the liveliest friendship, joined in the movement; so that "The Arbiter of Fashion" was left alone in the left-hand portion of the atrium. With a smile on his lips as he carelessly arranged the folds of his toga, he awaited what Cæsar might be pleased to say or do.

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All that Cæsar said was:

"Though I am requested to punish him, he is my companion and my friend. Even though he has wounded my heart, I wish him to know that that heart has for its friends naught but pardon."

"I have lost—and am lost," thought Petronius.

Cæsar arose, and the council came to an end.

IX

PETRONIUS then returned home, while Nero and Tigellinus repaired to Poppæa's atrium, where there were awaiting them some persons with whom the Prefect had already had an interview. Those persons were the two Rabbis of the Trans-Tiberian quarter (clad in long ceremonial robes), a young scribe who served as their secretary, and Chilo. At the sight of Cæsar the Rabbis turned pale with agitation, and, raising their hands to the level of the shoulder, buried their faces in the palms of them.

"Hail to the monarch of monarchs, to the king of kings!" said the senior. "Hail, master of the world and protector of the Chosen People! Hail, Cæsar, lion among men, whose reign is like unto the light of the sun, and unto the cedars of Lebanon, and unto a spring of living water, and unto the palm of Jericho! Hail!"

"But you have not ascribed to me a *divine* origin?" queried Cæsar.

The Rabbis turned paler still. Then the senior of them said:

"Your words, my lord, are sweet as are the marrow of grapes and the fruit of mulberries; for Jehovah has filled your heart with goodness. But though the predecessor of your father, the Emperor Caius, was a cruel tyrant, our emissaries attributed not to him the name of a deity, in that they preferred to die rather than to offend against the Law."

"And Caligula had them thrown to the lions?"

"No, my lord, for Caius Cæsar feared the wrath of the great Jehovah."

And at these words the Rabbis raised their heads, for the name of the dread Jehovah had inspired them with courage. Confident of their deity's power, they eyed Nero more boldly.

"I hear that you accuse the Christians of having fired Rome?" continued Cæsar.

"No, my lord; we accuse them only of being the enemies

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of the human race, of Rome, and of yourself, as well as persons who this long time past have threatened to fire both the city and the world. The rest will be set before you by this man here, whose lips could never soil themselves with a lie, seeing that in his veins there runs the blood of the Chosen People."

Nero turned to Chilo.

"Who are you?" he said.

"I am your faithful servant, O Osiris, and a poor Stoic."

"I hate the Stoics," remarked Nero. "I detest Thrascas as much as I do Musonius and Cornutus. The manner in which they speak of and express contempt for art disgusts me as much as do their indecency and their self-imposed wretchedness."

"My lord," Chilo hastened to say, "I am a Stoic only of necessity. Clothe my Stoicism in a garland of roses, O Radiant One, and set before it a jar of wine—and behold! it will sing of Anacreon in a fashion which would silence the whole band of Epicureans."

Nero, pleased with the title of "Radiant One," smiled.

"You please me," he said.

"The man is worth his weight in gold," put in Tigellinus.

"Add to my weight your own generosity, my lord," replied Chilo. "Else the wind might blow my reward away."

"At least you cannot weigh as much as Vitellius," remarked Nero.

"No, divine archer, for my spirit is not of lead."

"I perceive that your Law does not forbid you to call me a god?"

"Immortal one, my Law is your will. The Christians blaspheme that Law: and that is why I hate them."

"What know you of the Christians?"

"Will you permit me to weep, my lord?"

"No; for tears weary me."

"And thrice are you right seeing that eyes which have once beheld you ought never again to weep. My lord, I have come to seek your protection from my enemies."

"Speak, rather, of the Christians," put in Poppæa impatiently.

"I will do as you command, Isis," replied Chilo. "From youth upwards I have devoted myself to philosophy, and to the pursuit of truth. I have sought the latter among the ancient sages, and at the Academy of Athens, and at the Serapeum at Alexandria. Next, on hearing of the Christians, I conceived them to represent a new school wherein I might discover some particles of verity; and, to my misfortune, I got into touch with them. The first

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Christian with whom my unlucky star brought me in contact was a physician of Neapolis, named Glaucus. From him I learnt, little by little, that the Christians adore a certain Christ, who has promised to exterminate all mankind, and, while annihilating the cities of the earth, to leave the Christians themselves alive, provided that they assist in the work of annihilation. That, my lord, is why they hate the sons of Deucalion, poison fountains, and, at their gatherings, load with blasphemy both Rome and the temples in which we celebrate our worship of the Roman gods. Christ was crucified, but none the less He promised His devotees that, on the day when Rome should be destroyed, He would return to earth, and make over to them the sovereignty of the world."

"So now the people can understand why Rome has been burnt!" put in Tigellinus.

"There are many who understand the reason already, my lord," went on Chilo; "for it is my custom to frequent the Gardens and the Campus Martius, and to impart instruction as I go. Now, if you will deign to hear me out, I will tell you my reason for wishing to avenge myself. In the beginning the physician Glaucus never once warned me that the Christian doctrine enjoins hatred of mankind. On the contrary, he said frequently that Christ was a good deity, and that at the base of Christ's doctrine lay love. Such teaching as this my sensitive heart could not resist, for I had an affection for Glaucus, as well as complete confidence in him. With him, indeed, I shared my every morsel of bread, my every piece of money. Yet how, think you, my lord, he repayed me for this? On the way from Neapolis to Rome he stabbed me with a dagger, and sold my wife—my Berenice, my young and beautiful spouse—to a slave merchant! Ah, would that Sophocles could have known my history! But what am I saying? He who is listening to me is greater even than Sophocles."

"Poor man!" ejaculated Poppæa.

"He who beholds the countenance of Aphrodite is *not* poor, O divinity: and that countenance I am now beholding. Arrived at Rome, I endeavoured to get into touch with the Christian elders, in order that I might obtain justice against Glaucus (I conceived that they would compel him to return my wife). Consequently I made the acquaintance of the archpriest, of one Paul (who was thrown into prison here, but subsequently released), of the son of Zebedee, of Linus and Clitus, and of many more. I know where these men were dwelling before the fire; I know where their meeting-place is; and I could point out both a certain catacomb under the Vatican Hill and a

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certain cemetery beyond the Porta Nomentana where they practise their infamous rites. There I have seen the Apostle Peter. There I have seen Glaucus cut the throats of children, in order that the Apostle might sprinkle the heads of converts with their blood. There I have heard Lygia, the adoptive daughter of Pomponia Græcina, boast that, though she had been unable to bring with her the blood of a child, she had at least cast a spell over the little Augusta—over thy daughter, O divine Osiris, and thine, O Isis!

"Do you hear *that*, Cæsar?" said Poppæa.

"Can it be possible?" cried Nero.

"My own wrongs I would have pardoned," continued Chilo; "but, on hearing of this last, I was for plunging a dagger into the woman, and should have done so, but that I was restrained by the noble Vinicius, who loves the Lygian maiden."

"Vinicius? But she fled from him rather than—"

"Yes, she fled from him, but he set out to recover her, for he could not live without her companionship. For a small emolument I assisted him in the search, and it was I who pointed out to him the house in which she was lodging, among the Christians of the Trans-Tiberian quarter. To that house we proceeded together—taking with us also your wrestler, Croto, whom the noble Vinicius hired for greater safety; but Croto was strangled by a slave of Lygia's, named Ursus, who is a man of terrible strength, my lord—a man who can twist the neck of a bull as easily as another man can twist the stalk of a poppy. Aulus and Pomponia loved him for that reason."

"By Hercules!" cried Nero. "The mortal who could strangle Croto is worthy of a statue in the Forum! But you do wrong to invent what can never have happened, old man. Croto was stabbed by Vinicius."

"Is it thus that men can lie to the gods? With my own eyes did I see Croto's ribs break under the hands of Ursus, who afterwards hurled Vinicius to the ground, and would have killed him but that the Lygian maiden interposed. For many days afterwards Vinicius lay upon a sick bed; but the Christians tended him in the hope that, through his love for the maiden, he would become one of themselves. And, true enough, he has become one."

"Vinicius?"

"Yes."

"And Petronius also?" asked Tigellinus breathlessly.

Chilo wriggled, rubbed his hands, and said:

"I admire your keenness of discernment, my lord. Well, at least it is possible. Yes, at least it is possible."

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"Then I can understand his eagerness to defend the Christians."

Nero burst out laughing.

"Petronius a Christian!" he exclaimed. "Petronius become the enemy of life and of pleasure! Do not be fools, nor ask me to believe tales which may lead me to disbelieve you altogether."

"Well, at least the noble Vinicius has become a Christian. That such is the truth I swear by the light which emanates from yourself, for nothing hate I so much as I hate the sin of falsehood. Pomponia also is a Christian, and the little Aulus, and Lygia, and Vinicius. I served the last named faithfully, and he repaid me by having me flogged to please the physician Glaucus, although I am an old man and was, at the time, ill and hungry. By Hades have I sworn that I will never forget the deed! If, my lord, you will avenge me for the wrongs that I have suffered at the Christians' hands, I will deliver to you the Apostle Peter and Linus and Clitus and Glaucus and Crispus (these are the Christians' superiors) and Lygia and Ursus. Also I will point out to you Christians by the hundred and the thousand, and show you their houses of prayer and their cemeteries. All your prisons will not suffice to contain these people. Hitherto, despite my misfortunes, I have sought my consolation in philosophy. Suffer me henceforth to find my consolation in the favours which it is in your power to bestow. I am old, and have never tasted the pleasures of life. Enable me to enjoy some repose."

"You wish, then, to play the Stoic before a well-filled platter?" said Nero.

"He who renders you a service fills, by the act, also his platter."

"Very true, O philosopher."

Poppæa, however, was determined not to lose sight of her enemies. True, her desire for Vinicius had been a passing fancy that was born of jealousy, anger, and wounded conceit; but the coldness of the young patrician had aroused also her resentment. The mere fact of his having dared to prefer another woman to herself seemed to her a crime which called for vengeance. As for Lygia, Poppæa had conceived a hatred for her from the moment that she had first taken alarm at the beauty of the young lily from the North. Petronius, by talking of the narrowness of Lygia's hips, might hoodwink Cæsar, but not her, Poppæa! In a second had she perceived that Lygia was the only woman in Rome who could rival her, who could hope to carry off the palm.

"My lord," she said, "avenge our child."

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"Yes, and hasten to do so!" cried Chilo. "Hasten, or Vinicius will have time to conceal himself. I myself will point out to you the dwelling whither they resorted after the fire."

"Very well; I will give you an escort of ten men," said Tigellinus. "Begone at once."

"But, my lord, you did not see Croto expire under Ursus' hands, as I did. Were you to give me even an escort of fifty, I would not point out the dwelling except from a distance. Moreover, unless you imprison also Vinicius, I am a lost man."

Tigellinus glanced at Nero.

"Would it not be a good thing to make an end of uncle and nephew together?" he suggested.

Nero reflected for a moment or two.

"No," he said at length. "Not now. We could never get people to believe that it was either Petronius, Vinicius, or Pomponia Græcina who fired Rome. Their mansions were over-fine for them to be thrown away like that. Their turn will surely come, but in the meanwhile we must seek other victims."

"My lord, give me some soldiers for my safe conduct," again pleaded Chilo.

"Tigellinus will see to that," replied Nero.

"You can lodge with me for the time being," added the Prefect.

Chilo's face shone with delight.

"Then I will deliver the whole party into your hands," he said hoarsely. "Only hasten, hasten, hasten!"

X

On leaving Cæsar's presence, Petronius ordered himself to be carried to his mansion near the Carinæ; which, thanks to the garden by which it was surrounded on three sides, as well as to the small Forum Cæcilanum which fronted it, had escaped the fire. This circumstance had led the other Augustans to look upon him as a fortunate man; in addition to which, he had long been known as the spoiled child of fortune—a title confirmed by the ever-increasing friendship which Cæsar had seemed to evince for him. However, fortune's pampered offspring had now an opportunity of reflecting upon the inconstancy of his parent—or, rather, upon the resemblance of that parent to Chronos,¹ the goddess who devoured her own progeny.

¹ The Greek deity of time.

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"Had my mansion been burnt," he said to himself *en route*, "with its store of gems, Etruscan pottery, Alexandrian glass, and Corinthian bronzes, perhaps Nero would have got the better of his resentment. By Pollux, to think that I might have been Prefect of the Prætorians! Well, in that case I should have publicly denounced Tigellinus as the incendiary: for the incendiary he was. Yes, I should have clothed him in the condemned shift, handed him over to the people, averted danger from the Christians, and rebuilt the city. Who knows if, that done, a new era of prosperity would not have dawned for decent folk? I should have been forced to attempt the task, if only in the interest of Vinicius: and, had the work proved too much for me, I should have made over to him my duties as Prefect, and Nero would have made no opposition. Even had Vinicius ended by baptising every Prætorian, as well as Cæsar himself, what would that have mattered to me? Nero become pious, Nero become virtuous and compassionate—ah, what a pleasing spectacle that would have presented!"

Careless as ever, Petronius smiled. The next moment, however, his thoughts changed. He seemed to be at Antium again, and to be hearing Paul of Tarsus say, "You call us the enemies of life. But answer me this, Petronius. If Cæsar were a Christian, and he were to act according to our precepts, would not life be safer and quieter?"

"By Castor," thought Petronius, "the more throats of Christians be cut here, the more converts will Paul make! As for myself, I suppose I shall be sent an order to open my veins. An end like that is at least as good as any other one. True, I shall regret Eunice, and I shall regret my Myrrhenian vase; but Eunice is free now, and the vase will follow me to the grave. At all events Ahenobarbus is not going to have it. Also, I shall regret Vinicius. For the rest, although, of late, I have found time less wearisome than I used to do, I am ready to meet my fate. The universe is beautiful, but mankind, in general, so abject that life is not worth living. He who has known how to live ought to know also how to die. Though an Augustan, I have been at least a freer man than my fellow scoundrels."

He shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps they think that at this moment my knees are trembling beneath me—that the hair is bristling on my scalp. Well, first of all I am going to have a bath of violet-water, and then to summon my beauty of the golden locks, who shall anoint me with her dear hands. Thereafter we will have sung to us the hymn to Apollo which Anthemios

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has just composed. Have I not said somewhere, 'What need to think of death when death is for ever thinking of us?' Yet it would be a fine thing to discover that the Elysian Fields really exist! Eunice should join me there, and we would wander together through the meadows strewn with asphodels. Doubtless in that region society is less mixed than it is here, where there exist only rascals, mountebanks, unclean vulgarians, and men without taste or nobility. Not even *ten* Arbiters of Fashion could transform those Trimalcios into men fit to be seen! By Persephone, I have seen enough of them!"

With astonishment he realised that between him and his fellow Augustans there existed a difference. He knew them well, and had long been aware of their true worth; yet they seemed to him now to be more remote, to be more contemptible, than ever. Truly he *had* seen enough of them!

Next he took stock of the situation in which he found himself placed. That the peril was not actually immediate he could see clearly. The fact that Nero had seized an opportunity to utter high-sounding phrases concerning friendship and pardon showed that at present his (Nero's) hands were tied. Consequently he would need to seek some further excuse; and before he could find one a considerable time would have elapsed.

"His first task," thought Petronius, "will be to give the people games of which the Christians shall form the raw material. Only when that has been done will his thoughts recur to me. For the present, therefore, it would be useless for me to worry, or to change my mode of life. The person whom immediate danger threatens is Vinicius."

From that moment he devoted his whole thoughts to his nephew, whom he was resolved to save. Although the slaves who were bearing the litter were making what haste they could among the chimney-pots and heaps of ashes with which the neighbourhood of the Carinæ was littered, he ordered them impatiently to change their pace to a trot, in order that he might reach home the sooner. Since the fire Vinicius had been residing with his uncle, and the latter was fortunate in finding him at home when he arrived.

"Have you been to see Lygia to-day?" he at once inquired.

"I have this moment left her."

"Then listen to what I have to say, and lose no time in preparing for a country journey. This day it was decided, at a council held in Cæsar's palace, to impute the firing of Rome to the Christians. That decision will give rise to

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persecutions and to tortures. At any moment the hue and cry may begin. Take Lygia with you, and fly with all speed either to the further side of the Alps or to Africa. Lose not a moment, for the Palatine is nearer to the Trans-Tiberian quarter than is my mansion."

Vinicius was too much a man of war to lose any time in asking superfluous questions. He had listened with a frown on his brows, but no tremor in his heart. In a nature like his the first impulse is to attack the foe.

"I will go," he said.

"One word more. Take with you a purseful of gold, and also arms and a handful of your Christians. In case of need, rescue her by main force."

But Vinicius was already at the threshold of the atrium.

"Send me news by a slave," Petronius cried after him.

Left alone, the elder man set himself to pace among the pillars of the atrium, plunged in thought. He knew that, after the fire, Linus and Lygia had repaired to their former dwelling; which, like most of the Trans-Tiberian quarter, they had found intact. This was an unfavourable circumstance, since, lost amid a multitude of people, it would have been less easy for Tigellinus to find them. However, Petronius scarcely expected any one at the Palatine to know of their retreat; and that would help Vinicius to outstrip the Prætorians. Moreover, he had an idea that Tigellinus would wish to gather into his net the greatest possible number of Christians, and so would be forced to spread it over the whole of Rome, and, for that purpose, to divide his Prætorians into three small detachments.

"If he sends only a dozen men," reflected Petronius, "the Lygian giant will crack their ribs for them. Moreover, Ursus will have the assistance of Vinicius."

This gave Petronius confidence. It was true that to resist armed Prætorians was looked upon as equivalent to making war upon Cæsar; but Petronius knew that, should Vinicius escape Cæsar's vengeance, that vengeance would rebound upon himself, Petronius—and of that he recked little. Rather, he rejoiced at the thought of being able to upset the plans of Cæsar and Tigellinus. He resolved to spare neither men nor money. And since Paul of Tarsus, while at Antium, had converted the majority of his, Petronius', slaves to Christianity, he was certain of being able to count upon their goodwill and zeal in defending a Christian woman.

These reflections were interrupted by the entry of Eunice. At the sight of her he forgot Cæsar, he forgot the disgrace which he had experienced, he forgot the infamous Augustans, he forgot the persecution which was hanging over the

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Christians' heads, he forgot even Lygia and Vinicius. All that he thought of was to gaze his fill at Eunice—to gaze at her with the eyes of an æsthete who delighted in marvels of form—of a lover for whom love breathed only in form's beauty. Clad in a gossamer robe of muslin the transparency of which half revealed her roseate body, she looked divinely beautiful; and, conscious that she was being admired by the man whom she adored with her whole soul, she blushed like an innocent child that is hungering for caresses.

"What have you to say to me, Charis?" he asked as he stretched out his arms; and she, sinking her golden head upon those arms, replied:

"Anthemios has come with his singers, and wishes to know if you desire to hear him to-day."

"Yes, let him wait. He shall sing us his hymn to Apollo while we dine. By the woods of Paphos, but when I see you in this gossamer robe, I imagine that Aphrodite has taken the heavens for her mantle, and come down to visit me."

"My master!" cried Eunice.

"Come and embrace me, and give me your lips. Do you love me?"

"I could not love Zeus more." Quivering all over, she glued her lips to those of Petronius.

"But supposing that we should have to separate one day?" he said.

Eunice gave him an agonised look.

"What mean you, my lord?" she asked.

"Never mind. Do not be afraid. But I may soon have to go a very long journey."

"Then take me with you."

To change the conversation, Petronius inquired:

"Tell me, are there any asphodels on the lawns in the garden?"

"No. Ever since the fire the cypress-trees and the lawns have turned yellow, and the myrtles have lost their leaves. The garden seems dead."

"Ah, the city itself seems dead; and soon it will be a cemetery. An edict is about to be issued against the Christians, and they are going to be persecuted, and to be put to death by thousands."

"Why should the Christians be punished? They are good and peaceable people."

"That reason alone is sufficient."

"Then let us go to the seaside. Your godlike eyes do not love the sight of the blood."

"Meanwhile I must take my bath. You shall come

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with me to the elaothesium, and anoint my shoulders. By the girdle of Cypris, never have you looked more beautiful! I will have a bath made for you out of oyster shells, and in it you will look like a pearl of the rarest water. Will you come with me, my idol of the golden locks? "

An hour later, crowned with garlands of roses, and with their eyes lightly shaded, they took their seats at a table that was covered with gold plate, and served by slaves clad like Cupids. While drinking from ivy-wreathed goblets, they listened to a hymn to Apollo—sung, to the accompaniment of harps, by Anthemios' choristers. What mattered it to Petronius and his beloved that around the villa there stood only ruined chimneys, and that the wind was still scattering hither and thither the glowing ashes of the charred city? He and she were happy, and had no thought in their minds but of the love which had changed their lives into a celestial dream.

Just before the end of the hymn there entered the slave whose duty it was to wait in the atrium.

"Master," he said in a voice which trembled with anxiety. "before the gate there is a centurion with a company of soldiers. He desires to speak to you in Cæsar's name."

The choristers ceased singing and playing their harps, for uneasiness had come upon all present, seeing that Cæsar was not accustomed to use Prætorians in his relations with his friends, and their arrival at the present juncture could bode no good. Only Petronius showed no emotion, but said like a man who is pestered with constant invitations:

"They might at least have let me dine in peace! However, let the centurion enter."

The slave disappeared behind the curtain, and, a moment later, a heavy, regular footfall made itself heard as there entered a centurion named Aper, an acquaintance of Petronius', in armour and helmet of steel.

"My lord," he said, "here is a message from Cæsar."

Petronius nonchalantly extended his white hand, took the tablets, and, after glancing at their contents, handed them, with absolute *sang-froid*, to Eunice.

"To-night," he said, "Cæsar is going to read to us a new hymn anent the fall of Troy; and he has invited me to attend."

"I had orders to deliver you the message, and I have done so," said the centurion.

"Yes; and there will be no answer to it. But perhaps you can spare the time to drain a cup with us, centurion?"

"I thank you, my lord, and will gladly drink a cup to your good health; but longer I cannot stay, since I have other commissions to execute."

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"Why was the missive entrusted to you to deliver, instead of to a slave?"

"I know not, my lord. Peradventure it was because I have another duty to perform in this neighbourhood."

"I know," remarked Petronius. "You mean with regard to the Christians?"

"Yes, my lord."

"Has the hue and cry been long in operation?"

"Certain detachments of our men were sent to the Trans-Tiberian quarter before midday."

Here the centurion sprinkled a few drops of the wine upon the floor, in honour of Mars.

"The gods, my lord," he concluded, "give you all that you may desire!"

"Pray retain the cup for yourself," replied Petronius. Then he signed to Anthemios to resume the hymn to Apollo.

"Ahenobarbus is beginning his games with myself and Vinicius," he thought as the harps struck up. "Yes, I can see his intention: he meant to terrify me by sending an ordinary invitation by the hand of a centurion. To-night this man will be questioned as to the manner in which I received the letter; but no, no—I am not going to permit you *that* pleasure, base, cruel buffoon that you are! Even though I know that I cannot escape my fate, you make a great mistake if you think that I shall answer your look with eyes of entreaty, or that on my face you will be able to read either fear or humility!"

"Caesar writes, 'Come if you wish,'" said Eunice. "Shall you go, my lord?"

"I feel in a very good humour," replied Petronius, "and think that I could bear even to hear his verses. Consequently I shall accept the invitation, and the more so since Vinicius will be unable to attend."

After dinner he put himself into the hands of his hair-dressers and folders of togas, and, an hour later, set out for the Palatine in his litter, looking as handsome as a god. The time was late, and the evening mild and calm. Indeed, the moon's brilliancy was such that the lantern-bearers who were preceding the litter extinguished their torches.

Through the ruined streets were wandering bands of drunken men, with their foreheads wreathed with ivy and honeysuckle, and their hands grasping boughs of myrtle or laurel which they had plucked in Caesar's gardens. Abundance of grain and the prospect of games beyond the ordinary had filled the hearts of the populace with joy. Here and there people were singing hymns in honour of "divine right" and the glory of love. Further on a party of revellers were dancing in the clear radiance of the moon.

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Several times the slaves were obliged to demand passage for the litter "of the noble Petronius," and each time the crowd parted, applauding its favourite.

Petronius still hoped that Vinicius had outstripped the Prætorians, and succeeded in attaining safety with Lygia—or, in a less favourable event, in rescuing her from the hands of her captors. Yet of this he would have liked to have made sure, since he foresaw that he would be called upon to answer diverse questions for which he might stand better prepared than happened to be the case.

Arrived at Tiberius' palace, he found the atrium already full of Augustans. These friends of yesterday, though astonished to see that he had received an invitation, still held themselves aloof. Nevertheless he advanced into their midst, looking as careless and handsome as ever, and evincing the same assurance as if he had been fate's master. Consequently some of those present began to regret that they had been so hasty in giving him the cold shoulder.

Cæsar, however, pretended not to see him, and went on talking to his intimates without noticing the newcomer's salute.

Tigellinus, for his part, advanced to meet Petronius, and said:

"Good evening to you, Arbiter of Fashion. Do you still continue to assert that it was not the Christians who fired Rome?"

Petronius tapped him on the shoulder as he might have done to a freedman.

"You know as much about the matter as I do," he replied.

"But I should never think of rivalling *your* sagacity."

"That is wise of you. Otherwise, when Cæsar has read us his new poem on the fall of Troy you would be forced, instead of screeching like a peacock, to give us your opinion—which would be manifestly absurd."

Tigellinus bit his lips. He was far from pleased that Cæsar should have chosen that night for reciting the continuation of his "Troïad," seeing that the ceremony would re-open to Petronius a field in which he had no rival. True enough, throughout the whole of the reading habit caused Nero to keep turning involuntary eyes upon Petronius, in the hope of reading his opinion in his face.

The other listened to the poem with raised eyebrows—now applauding, now appearing to be concentrating his attention upon it, as though uncertain whether he had heard a given passage aright. Next he praised or criticised certain passages—demanding one or another correction, and requesting that some of the verses should undergo a further process of embellishment. Nero himself perceived that the

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extravagant laudation of the other Augustans was meant only to serve their own interests, whereas Petronius interested himself in the poetry for its own sake, as a connoisseur in the art. When the Arbiter approved of a poem one might feel sure that it really deserved commendation. Gradually, therefore, Cæsar relapsed into his old habit of discussing points with Petronius, and of contradicting him; until finally, on the latter contesting the appositeness of certain words, Cæsar exclaimed:

"You shall see, in the concluding version of this, why I used those expressions."

"Ah!" thought Petronius. "Then I *am* reprieved—at all events until the concluding version."

More than one courtier, on hearing Nero's words, said to himself: "Alas! Petronius will now have time to work himself back into favour, and even to supplant Tigellinus." Once more amiability besieged him. But the conclusion of the evening's ceremony was less happy; for, just as Petronius was taking his leave, Nero asked him with an air of malicious joy:

"And Vinicius—why has not he also come?"

Petronius did not know for certain whether Vinicius and Lygia had got clear of the city, or he would have replied, "Because, with your permission, he has to-day married, and departed from Rome." As it was, he thought it advisable, in face of Nero's strange smile, to say:

"Your invitation, my lord, did not find him at home."

"Then pray inform him that I shall be glad to see him here," was Nero's reply. "Also, recommend him, in my name, not to fail to be present at the games, since in them the Christians are going to take the chief part."

Petronius felt disquieted by these words, since they directly concerned Lygia. Re-entering his litter, he ordered the bearers to proceed as fast as they could go. Unfortunately it was an order that was difficult of execution, owing to the fact that a compact, vociferous mob had gathered in front of Tiberius' palace—a mob which, though drunken like the first one, was by no means indulging in dance and song. On the contrary, it seemed to be greatly infuriated, and to Petronius' ears came cries which at first he could not understand. Gradually, however, those cries grew louder and more distinct, until they swelled into one fierce roar of "The Christians to the lions!"

As the elegant litters of the courtiers pressed their way through the shouting throng new gangs of roughs kept appearing from the recesses of the ruined streets. From mouth to mouth the news was banded that the hue and cry for the Christians began before midday, and that

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already a large number of the incendiaries had been captured. Through streets old and new, through alleyways choked with rubbish, through the quarter of the Palatine, through the whole city, in fact, these clamours rose and fell, growing ever more menacing.

"The vile crew!" thought Petronius to himself. "It is a populace worthy of its Emperor!" And with the thought there came into his mind another one—namely, that it was impossible that the world of Rome could much longer exist. True, Rome was the mistress of the world: yet in her there was a hidden cancer, and from her there was arising the odour of a corpse. Often had these points been discussed by his fellow Augustans; yet never before had Petronius so clearly realised that the garlanded, trophy-bedecked chariot in which Rome was riding at the head of a train of fettered nations was making straight for the abyss. In his mind's eye he saw the procession as a pageant of folly and buffoonery.

That procession was marching under the auspices of Nero; yet, were Nero to disappear, another—a similar, or even a worse—ruler would take his place. With such a people and such an order of patricians, it was unlikely that a man of a different stamp would ascend the throne. There was going to be a new orgy, and an even fouler and more abject orgy than the last! Yet orgies could not last for ever. The day must come when they would cease, even if it were only from fatigue and exhaustion.

Petronius also felt fatigued at the thought of these horrors. "Yet the god of death," he said to himself, "is no more repellent of guise than is the god of sleep. Both of them have wings."

"Has the noble Vinicius returned?" he inquired as he entered his villa.

"Yes; a moment since," replied the slave.

"Then he has not succeeded in rescuing her," was Petronius' unspoken comment.

Doffing his toga, he hastened into the atrium. Vinicius was seated on a three-legged stool, with his head resting on his hands, and his elbows on his knees. At the sound of footsteps on the tiled floor he raised to view a countenance wherein only the eyes seemed to be alive.

"Then you arrived too late?" was Petronius' query.

"Yes. She had been taken away before noon."

A moment's silence followed.

"Have you seen her?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"In the Mamertine prison."

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Petronius started—then threw at the other a questioning look.

"No," said Vinicius. "She has not been thrown into the tullianum,¹ nor yet into the prison proper. In return for a large sum, the gaoler has given her his own room, while Ursus is lying across the threshold, to keep watch over her."

"Why did not Ursus defend her from arrest?"

"Because they had sent no less than fifty centurions. Moreover, Linus would not allow him to do so."

"And Linus himself?"

"Is *in extremis*, and was left behind when the others were taken."

"What do you propose to do?"

"To save her or to die with her. I too am a Christian."

Vinicius seemed to be speaking calmly; yet in his voice there was a note of such heartrending agony that Petronius' soul was moved to the core.

"I know what you must be feeling," he said. "But how do you propose to save her?"

"I have bribed her guardians richly—in the first place, to preserve her from being outraged by them, and, in the second place, to ensure that they do not oppose her flight."

"And when is the flight to be?"

"I am told that Lygia cannot be surrendered immediately, because of the responsibility; but when the prisons disgorge their occupants she will be handed over to my care. It is an extreme measure, but already you will have saved us both, for you are a friend of Cæsar's—of the Cæsar who gave her to me. Go to him, therefore, and save us now!"

Without answering, Petronius summoned a slave, and ordered him to bring two dark mantles and a couple of swords.

Then, turning to Vinicius, he said:

"I will give you my answer as we go. Meanwhile, take this mantle and this sword, and let us start for the prison. There you will offer the gaolers a hundred thousand sesterii—two hundred, five hundred, thousand sesterii—nay, even a million—to let her depart forthwith. Otherwise it will be too late."

"Then come," said Vinicius.

A moment later they were in the street.

"Now listen," said Petronius. "Since yesterday I have been in disgrace at Court, and my life is hanging by a single thread. Consequently, I can do nothing with Cæsar. Worse still, I am certain that he would act in direct contradiction of any petition of mine. Otherwise, is it likely that

¹ An underground dungeon, reached only through an aperture in the ceiling.

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I should have advised you to fly with Lygia, or to rescue her by force? For you must understand that, had you succeeded, Cæsar's anger would have turned against myself. As things stand, he would rather serve you than me. So it is no use our thinking of Cæsar. Your only plan is to get Lygia out of the prison, and to fly with her. Should that not prove feasible, there will remain other resources. Remember, however, that it is not merely on account of her faith that she is in prison, but for the reason that both of you are being sacrificed to the vindictiveness of Poppæa. How else could we explain the fact that Lygia was thrown into prison before her companions? Who could have pointed out her dwelling to the authorities? I tell you that for a long time past she has been spied upon. Though I know that I shall break your heart by removing this last ray of hope, I feel bound to tell it you in order to prove to you that unless you can succeed in rescuing her before they get wind of the fact that you are attempting to do so, you and she are lost."

"Yes, I understand," replied Vinicius despondently.

The hour was late, and in the streets not a living soul was to be seen. Suddenly, however, their conversation was interrupted by a drunken gladiator, who, coming from the opposite direction, stumbled as he passed them, and lurched straight into Petronius' arms. Belching forth breath charged with liquor, he shouted hoarsely:

"To the lions with the Christians!"

"Mirmillo," said Petronius very quietly, "pray pass on your way. It is good advice that I am giving you."

The sot seized Petronius by the arm.

"Do you too cry 'To the lions with the Christians!' " he said. "Otherwise I will break your head for you!"

Petronius' nerves were on edge with similar clamourings. Ever since he had left the Palatine they had been stifling him like a nightmare, and racking his ears. Consequently when he saw the gladiator's huge fist above his head he felt that he could bear no more.

"My friend," he said, "you stink of liquor, and disgust me."

And to the hilt he planted in the fellow's breast the rapier which he had brought with him. Then, taking Vinicius by the arm, he went on, as though nothing had happened:

"Cæsar has invited you to be present at the games in which the Christians are to appear. Do you understand what that means? It means that he and his intimates wish to enjoy the spectacle of your agony. Doubtless the same reason accounts for the fact that you and myself are not in

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prison. If you cannot rescue Lygia at once—well, perhaps Acte will put in a word for you, though it is doubtful whether she could effect much. Possibly, again, your Sicilian estates might tempt Tigellinus. Try if they will.”

“I will offer him everything that I possess in the world,” replied Vinicius.

The Forum (in the vicinity of which stood the Mamertine prison) was not far from the Carinæ. By the time that they had arrived thither the night was paling, and the outlines of the building were standing out from the darkness. Suddenly Petronius came to a halt.

“The Prætorians!” he exclaimed. “We are too late!”

True enough, around the prison there was posted a double line of soldiers—the first beams of day turning their helmets and the points of their spears to silver.

“Never mind; let us go on,” said Vinicius.

Halting in front of the cordon, Petronius, whose memory was excellent, and who knew not only the officers, but also almost all the men, of the Prætorian Guard, made a sign to a company commander.

“What is it, Niger?” he inquired. “Why are you mounting guard around the prison?”

“Noble Petronius, because the Prefect fears an attempt to rescue the incendiaries.”

“Then have you orders also to allow no one to enter?” Vinicius put in.

“No, my lord. We are hoping that their friends will come to visit them, and so enable us to trap an even larger number of Christians.”

“Let *me* enter, then,” said Vinicius. With that, pressing Petronius’ hand, he added to his uncle:

“Go you and see Acte. I will visit you later, in order to hear from you her reply.”

“Be it so,” assented Petronius.

At that moment there arose from the heart of those massive walls and underground dungeons the sound of voices singing. Though at first subdued, the hymn gradually grew louder as men, women, and children lifted their voices in unison. In the stillness of the dawning day the prison seemed to be one great resounding harp. No voice of sadness or of despair was there to be heard, but only a general note of joy and of triumph. The soldiers gazed at one another in amazement.

By this time the dawn was painting the sky rose-colour and gold.

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XI

THE cry of "The Christians to the lions!" had come to ring ceaselessly through the streets of the great city; for no one any longer doubted that the Christians had been the authors of the fire, nor did any one desire to doubt it, seeing that their punishment was to provide a public spectacle. At the same time, a belief was gaining ground that the fire would never have attained such fearful proportions had not the wrath of the gods overhung the city. Consequently, expiatory sacrifices were ordered to be offered in every temple, and, in conformity with the Sibylline Books, the Senate decreed that public prayer should be made to Vulcan, to Ceres, and to Proserpine. Matrons also offered sacrifices to Juno, and marched in procession to the seashore, that they might draw thence water with which to sprinkle the statue of the goddess. In short, all Rome hastened to purify itself of its sins, to make offering to the immortals, and to implore their forgiveness.

Also, new streets began to be marked out among the ruins, and the foundations to be laid of new mansions, palaces, and temples. Most of all was haste bestowed upon the huge wooden amphitheatres in which the Christians were to die, and immediately after the council held in Tiberius' palace orders were sent to the various proconsuls that they should forward to Rome as many wild beasts as possible, while Tigellinus emptied the vivaria of every city in Italy, and organised hunts in which whole populations were mobilised. From Asia came elephants and tigers, from the Nile crocodiles and hippopotami, from the Atlas region lions, from the Pyrenees wolves and bears, from Hibernia fierce dogs, from Epirus savage hounds, and from Germany buffaloes and aurochs. Cæsar's aim was to wipe out the memory of the fire in torrents of blood, and to intoxicate the city with carnage. Never before had butchery been organised on such a magnificent scale.

Its taste whetted by these preparations, the populace assisted the police and the Prætorians in their hunting down of human beings. The latter was not a difficult task, inasmuch as bands of Christians were still camping with the rest of the people in the Gardens, and proclaiming aloud their faith. When surrounded, they would kneel down, and let themselves be taken without resistance, as they sang their hymns. This calmness, however, exasperated the mob, which mistook it for the fanaticism of hardened criminals; with the result that at times the

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people seized the arrested persons from the soldiers, and either tore them in pieces or dragged the women to prison by the hair of their heads, and dashed the children against the paving-stones. In ruined houses, in chimneys, in caves was the search carried out. At night, by the light of gala fires, banquets and bacchanalian dances were improvised before the prisons, while over all there could be heard the roaring of the lions. The gaols were swelled to bursting point, yet every day the rabble and the Prætorians brought thither new victims. It might have been thought that men had lost the power of speech save to utter the one cry, "The Christians to the lions! The Christians to the lions!" During those days and nights of stifling heat, blood and madness saturated the very air.

On the other hand, this boundless cruelty awoke in the Christians an equally boundless yearning for martyrdom. Voluntarily they went to death. Nay, they even sought it, and restrained their zeal only in deference to strict orders issued by their superiors to the effect that Christians were to assemble nowhere save without the city walls, in the catacombs near the Appian Way, or in vineyards belonging to certain patrician converts to the faith. None of the latter had been arrested, although it was known at the Palatine that Flavius, Domitilla, Pomponia Græcina, Cornelius Pudens, and Vinicius were Christians. The truth was that Cæsar apprehended considerable difficulty in convincing the populace that persons of this kind had set fire to Rome. Consequently their punishment was to come later. Some people imagined that they owed their safety to the influence of Acte; but this was a mistake. True, after leaving Vinicius, Petronius visited Acte, to implore her help and protection on behalf of Lygia; but the poor woman had nothing to offer him but her tears, for she was tolerated only in so far as she hid herself from the sight of Poppæa and Cæsar. Nevertheless she went to visit Lygia in prison, and took her clothing and food; which step did not fail to make a certain impression upon the gaolers.

Petronius could not forget that it was owing to his unfortunate schemes for abducting Lygia from the Aulus mansion that she was now deprived of her freedom: consequently he spared neither time nor efforts towards her release. Within the space of a few days he interviewed Seneca, Domitius Afer, Crispinilla (through whom he wished to reach Poppæa), Terpnos, Diodorus, Pythagoras, Aliturus, and Paris (of whom to the last-named three Cæsar refused nothing). Also, through Chrysothemis, who was now the mistress of Vatinius, he attempted to enlist the help of the latter, and lavished upon him as many promises and bribes

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as he had done upon the rest. All his efforts, however, proved fruitless. Seneca, doubtful of the morrow, explained to him that, even if the Christians had *not* fired Rome, they ought to be exterminated for safety's sake, and that a massacre of them would be justified by reasons of State; while Terpnos and Diodorus took Petronius' money, and did nothing in return. As for Vatinius, he complained to Cæsar that attempts had been made to corrupt him. Only Aliturus, though previously hostile to the Christians, now took pity upon them, and ventured to intercede for Lygia. To his intercession he received the following reply:

"Think you that my soul is less strong than that of Brutus, who, for the safety of Rome, spared not even his own children?"

Petronius, the moment that these words were reported to him, cried:

"Now that Cæsar has compared himself to Brutus, all is lost!"

Vinicius too—the man hitherto so haughty—did what he could to enlist the Augustans' sympathy on behalf of Lygia; and, through Vitellius, he made Tigellinus an offer of his all, including even his Sicilian estates. But the Prefect, anxious for Poppæa's good graces, refused the proffered bribe. Next, though it would have availed Vinicius nothing to go to Cæsar in person, and to throw himself at his feet, he debated the latter idea.

"What if he were to refuse?" said Petronius. "Or what if he were to reply with a jest or an infamous threat?"

Vinicius' features contracted with grief and rage

"Now," added Petronius, "you see why I am advising you not to make the attempt. You would but ruin Lygia's last chance of salvation."

Vinicius repressed his fury, and said as he passed his hand over his face:

"No, no! I am a Christian."

"Yet you would forget that fact, even as you have already done. You have the right to ruin yourself, but not the right to ruin her. Remember the daughter of Scjanus, and the outrage to which she was subjected before she was put to death."

XII

THUS all efforts proved vain. Vinicius even stooped to solicit the help of Cæsar's and Poppæa's freedmen and slaves—paying for their good graces with magnificent gifts and shadowy promises. At length he perceived that he

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was being duped by these fellows, and that a simulated indifference with regard to the danger which menaced Lygia would have stood him in better stead. Petronius also arrived at that conclusion.

Day succeeded day. The amphitheatres were now ready, and tickets of admission to the morning games had begun to be distributed. But this time, on account of the unwonted supply of victims, the morning games would have to last for several days, or weeks, or even months. Already the authorities were at their wits' end where to incarcerate the Christians. Fever was raging in the overcrowded prisons, and the common trenches in which slaves were buried were full to the brim. Consequently, for fear lest pestilence should overrun the city, it was decided to hasten matters on.

These items of news, when they reached Vinicius, deprived him of his last ray of hope. A sort of vacancy had now stamped itself upon his features, which had grown so much darker that they resembled the waxen masks with which Roman *lararia* were adorned. Even when spoken to, he would raise his head mechanically, and gaze at his interlocutor with eyes which had no meaning in them. His nights he passed with Ursus at the door of Lygia's cell, and on his return to Petronius' villa he would pace the atrium until morning. Often the slaves found him either upon his knees, with his hands extended to heaven, or lying prone upon his face. At such times he was praying to Christ; for Christ was his last and only hope. Nothing but a miracle could now save Lygia; and as Vinicius lay with his face pressed against the floor he would send up petition after petition that a miracle might happen.

However, his mind still remained sufficiently clear to enable him to understand that Peter's prayers would be more efficacious than his own. Peter it was who had promised him Lygia, who had baptised him, who had worked miracles. Let Peter, therefore, come to the rescue and help him.

So he sought out the quarryman, and from him learnt that in the vineyards of Cornelius Pudens, beyond the Porta Salaria, there was going to be a gathering of Christians held. Consequently the quarryman and he waited until nightfall, and then passed the city walls, crossed a number of ravines covered with furze-bushes, and reached the enclosure belonging to Pudens.

On entering the outbuilding, Vinicius saw before him about a dozen persons on their knees—a mere handful of Christians who had escaped pursuit. These persons were reciting a Litany, and at intervals male and female voices would chant the refrain: "Christ have mercy upon us!"

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Under a cross nailed to the wall there was kneeling also Peter, engaged in prayer. From afar Vinicius recognised him by his white hair and his outstretched hands. The young man felt as though he would like to make his way through the groups of people, and throw himself at the Apostle's feet, and cry, "Help me!"; but the solemnity of the prayer, added to a sudden failure of his strength, caused him also to sink upon his knees in the entrance-way, groaning, "Christ have mercy upon me!"

Every one around him was thinking to see realised the Christian dream that Christ would manifest Himself again, and put to flight evil, and overthrow Nero, and reign over the universe. Again and again those present would gaze heavenwards, and strain their ears, and quaveringly offer up prayer. Vinicius too felt himself overcome with the same rapture as had seized him in the quarryman's hut. He felt that the heavens would suddenly open, that the earth would tremble to its foundations, and that the compassionate, yet awful, Christ would descend in a blaze of light, with the stars of the firmament at His feet. Then would He raise up the faithful, and command the persecutors to descend into the abyss!

Burying his face in his hands, Vinicius almost fainted. Around him there had fallen a silence, as though the words of appeal had suddenly become choked in every throat. He seemed to know that a miracle was imminent—that, on rising and opening his eyes, he would see—yes, he felt sure of it—the radiance which blinds all human sight, and hear the voice which causes all human hearts to quake.

Yet the silence remained unbroken, save that a woman gave vent to a convulsive sob.

Vinicius raised himself, and gazed apprehensively in front of him.

In the building was quivering, in place of the miraculous radiance, only the mean light of a few candles and of some stray beams of moonlight which were entering through a crack in the roof. The stillness was such that even the repressed breathing of the watchers outside could be heard.

At length Peter rose, and turned towards the assembly.

"My brethren," he said, "lift up your hearts to the Saviour, and offer unto Him your tears."

From among the congregation there came a voice—a voice charged with bitterness, with a grief past measuring.

"I am a widow," the voice said. "Once I had a son who was my only support. Take me unto him, O Lord!"

Again a silence fell. Peter, standing before the kneeling congregation, seemed to be the image of powerlessness and decrepitude. Another voice raised its plaint.

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"The executioners have outraged my daughters!" it said. "And Christ has permitted it!"

A third said:

"I am left desolate with my children. Should I be taken, who will give them bread and water?"

And a fourth:

"Linus was spared; yet now have they seized him, and are putting him to the torture!"

And a fifth:

"If we return, the Prætorians will arrest us. We know not where to hide. Who will defend us?"

One by one, these cries of agony floated upwards through the calm night. Meanwhile the aged fisherman had closed his eyes and bent his white, white head before the chorus of grief and terror. Once more nothing was to be heard but the tremulous breathing of the watchers without.

Vinicius leapt to his feet. He had a yearning to cleave his way through the assembly, and, reaching the Apostle, to beg his assistance. Suddenly he seemed to see an abyss open before him. Was the Apostle about to confess his impotence—to avow that the Roman Cæsar was more terrible than Jesus of Nazareth? Were that so, the abyss would swallow up not only his last remaining hope, but also himself and Lygia and his love for Christ and faith and everything else which had made him live! Thenceforth there would remain nothing but death and endless night!

At length Peter began to speak in a voice so stifled that at first it was scarcely audible.

"My children," he said, "on Golgotha I saw the Lord nailed to the Cross. With these very ears did I hear the hammers of the executioners. And I saw those who raised the Cross on high, in order that the multitudes might look upon the death of the Son of Man. And I saw him who pierced His side, and I saw the Son of Man when death came upon Him. Then, as I was returning from the Crucifixion, I, like yourselves, cried out in my sorrow: 'Alas, alas, my Lord! Thou art God Himself: why, therefore, hast Thou suffered thus, why art Thou dead, why hast Thou taken from us, who believed that Thy kingdom had come, our one hope?' But on the third day He, our Lord and Master, rose from the dead, and abode with us until the day when, clothed in light, He ascended unto His Father's mansions. And we, perceiving that our faith had been weak, felt strengthened in our hearts, and began thenceforth to sow the good seed."

Here Peter turned to her who had uttered the first lament, and continued in firmer accents:

"Wherefore do you complain? God Himself did undergo

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torture and death; yet you seek that He should defend you from the same! O faithless ones! Have you not understood His words? Has He promised to you but this earthly life? No; He comes to you with the words, 'Follow me,' that He may take you unto Himself. Yet you seek to cling to earth with both hands, and cry, 'Help, Lord!' I myself am as dust before God; yet before you I am His Apostle and His Vicar, to say unto you in the name of Christ: What lies before you is not death, but life, is not sorrow, but lasting joy, is not bondage, but rule. To you, widow, I, the Apostle of God, declare that your son will not die, but be born again into the glory of the eternal life, where you will find him awaiting you. To you, O father whose daughters the executioners have raped, I promise that you will one day behold those daughters whiter than the lilies of Hebron. To all who shall witness the death of those you love, to all who are downtrodden and sorrowful and afraid, to all who are about to die, I say, in the name of Christ, that they will pass as from sleep to a vision of joy, and from darkness to the dawn of God. Therefore, in the name of Christ I pray that the scales may fall from your eyes, and the fire of faith may kindle your hearts!"

With that the Apostle raised his hand, as though issuing an order; and as he did so all present felt new blood begin to course through their veins, and the marrow of their bones thrill. For before them there no longer stood a weak old man, but a man who had snatched their souls from the dust and faint-heartedness, that he might transport them to far-distant regions.

Then Peter resumed:

"Sow you in tears, that you may reap in joy. Why should you quake before the powers of evil? Above the world, above Rome, above cities and their walls, there dwells the Lord, even as He dwells in you. The stones may drink of your tears, and the sand of your blood, and the ditches be choked with your bodies: yet do I say unto you that it will be you who will have gained the victory. The Lord is advancing to the assault of this city of crime and oppression and pride; and you are His army. And even as He has redeemed the sins of the world with His agony and His blood, so wills He that with your agony and your blood you shall redeem this sink of iniquity. By the mouth of him who is speaking does He now declare this unto you."

The Apostle raised his hands and eyes to heaven, and remained motionless: and all who were present felt that at that moment he was beholding what they, with their more perishable eyes, could not discern. For a long while he gazed upwards, as though in ecstasy. At length he said:

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"Thou art here, O Lord, and art showing me the way! O Christ, it is not in Jerusalem, but in this city of Satan, that Thou hast willed that Thy seat shall be established! In this city Thou hast willed to build Thy Church of tears and blood! In this city, where Nero reigneth, Thy Eternal Kingdom is to arise! In this city Thou commandest that Thy people who are wrapped in fear shall lay with their bones the foundations of Thy holy Sion! In this city Thou commandest that over Thy Church, and over the nations of the universe, my soul shall rule! Yea, Thou shalt put strength into the faint-hearted, that they may become steadfast! Yea, Thou dost bid me feed Thy sheep until the ages shall have passed away! Praise and glory be to Thee who hast bidden us go forth and conquer! Hosanna, Hosanna!"

As Peter uttered the words the clear beams of the summer moon filled the whole building with light.

Emerging from his ecstatic trance, Peter turned towards the congregation a head over which divine inspiration had shed its halo.

"Even as the Lord has overcome in you all doubt," he said, "so do you go forth, and conquer in His name."

Already he knew that they would conquer. Already he knew what must be born of their blood and tears. Yet his voice trembled with emotion as he made over them the sign of the cross.

"I bless you, my children," he said, "unto suffering, and unto death, and unto eternity."

And with one voice those present made answer as they crowded around him:

"We are ready, O Master. Yet do you save yourself, for you are the holy Vicar of the Lord."

One by one he laid his hands upon them as they clung to him for his benediction. It was as though a father were taking leave of his children before they started on a long journey. Then all left the building—yearning to oppose to the might and the ferocity of the Beast the might which lay within themselves.

With the Apostle went Nereus, a servant in the employ of Cornelius Pudens, that he might conduct the old man to his (Nereus') dwelling by a secret path which ran through the vineyard. The clearness of the night enabled Vinicius to follow them, and, on reaching Nereus' hut, he threw himself at the Apostle's feet.

Recognising him, Peter inquired:

"What seek you of me, my son?"

But Vinicius, after the words which he had heard at the meeting, lacked courage to make his request. Clasp- ing the

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Apostle's feet, and pressing his head against them as he gave vent to sob after sob, he could only by silence implore Peter's compassion.

"Yes, I know. They have taken away from you the maiden whom you love. Pray for her."

"Master," groaned Vinicius as he clasped yet closer the Apostle's feet, "Master, I am the most lowly of worms; but you—you have known Christ. Pray to Him, therefore, in my stead."

Peter was moved by this suffering. His memory recalled the day when Lygia, overwhelmed by Crispus' words, had fallen, like her lover, at his feet, and besought his pardon. And he remembered how he had raised and comforted her.

Even so did he now raise Vinicius.

"My son," he said, "I *will* pray for her; but do you think also upon the words which I have spoken concerning those who doubt. God Himself suffered the agony of the Cross. Moreover, forget not that after this life there begins another one, and an eternal."

"I know it, O Master," said Vinicius, gasping with white lips. "But I cannot bear it, I cannot bear it! If blood must be shed, let Christ take mine, not hers. I am a soldier: let Him, then, punish me twice and thrice as much, if only He save *her* from death. All I could bear, all I could endure, were she but suffered to go free. She is still but a child, my lord, and He is more powerful even than Cæsar—of that I am assured, assured. And you yourself have loved her, and have blessed us. She is an innocent child. She is—"

Again he bent himself to the earth, and pressed his face against Peter's knees, repeating:

"You have known Christ, my lord—you have known Him. He will listen to you. Pray for her!"

The Apostle closed his eyes, and prayed long and earnestly. By the light of flashes which kept glancing across the sky Vinicius watched Peter's lips, to hear therefrom his sentence of life or of death. In the stillness quails were uttering their call in the vineyard, and the sound of the mills in the Via Salaria was faintly audible.

"Vinicius," said the Apostle, "have you faith?"

"Yes, my lord. Otherwise, should I have come hither?"

"Then have faith unto the end, for faith can remove mountains. No matter whether you see this maiden under the sword of the executioner or in the jaws of lions, still have faith, for Christ can save her. Trust always, and pray to Him. I, too, will pray with you."

Then, raising his face to heaven, he cried aloud:

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"O Christ the Merciful, look upon this sorrowful heart, and comfort it! O Christ the Merciful—Thou who didst pray unto Thy Father that He might suffer the cup of bitterness to pass from Thee—turn now that cup from the lips of Thy servant! Amen!"

In his turn, Vinicius, with his hands outstretched to the stars, groaned:

"Christ, I am thine! Take me in her stead!"

And in the east the sky was beginning to grow pale.

XIII

AFTER leaving the Apostle, Vinicius returned to the Mamertine prison. There the Prætorians who succeeded one another on guard knew him by sight, and usually allowed him to enter without difficulty: but this time their ranks did not open before him, and he found himself confronted by a centurion.

"Pardon me, noble tribune," said the latter, "but to-day we have orders to permit *no one* to pass."

"You have orders?" re-echoed Vinicius, turning pale.

The soldier looked at him compassionately, and added:

"Yes—orders from Cæsar, my lord. There are many people lying sick in the prison, and perhaps the authorities fear lest visitors should spread the infection."

"But did you not say that the orders concern this day alone?"

"We shall be relieved at midday."

Vinicius said no more, but uncovered his head, for the pileolus which he was wearing seemed to be too tight for his head, as though it were a headdress of iron. The soldier again approached him, and said under his breath:

"Have no fear, my lord. The gaolers and Ursus are with her."

So saying, he bent forward, and with his long Gallic sword sketched, on a block of stone, the figure of a fish.

Vinicius looked at him inquiringly.

"Yet you are a Prætorian?" he said.

"Yes; until the day when I shall be *there*,"—and the soldier pointed to the prison.

"I also am a worshipper of Christ."

"May His name be for ever blessed! Yes, my lord, I know all. I cannot let you enter the prison, but if you care to give me a letter I will commit it to its destination by the hand of the gaolers."

"I thank you, my brother."

He pressed the soldier's hand, and departed. The sun

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was bathing the prison wall in light, and with the clearness of the morning Vinicius' soul began to recover its confidence. This Christian soldier had once more shown him the power of Christ. He stopped, and gazed at the rose-coloured clouds which were gliding over the Capitol and the temple of Jupiter Stator.

"Though I have not seen her to-day, O Lord," was his thought, "I yet trust in Thy mercy."

On his return he found Petronius at home. The latter, faithful to his habit of turning night into day, had just arrived, but had had time to take a bath, and to have himself rubbed all over with oil, before retiring.

"I have some news for you," he said to the younger man. "To-day I have been to see Tullius Senecio, who happened to be receiving a visit also from Cæsar. Why Augusta was seized with the unfortunate idea of bringing the little Rufius with her I do not know; but perhaps it was because she hoped to touch Cæsar's heart with his beauty. However that may be, the boy went to sleep while Cæsar was reading, even as Vespasian once did; whereupon the furious Ahenobarbus threw a jar at his head, and inflicted a dangerous wound. Poppæa fainted, and all who were present heard Cæsar say, 'I have had enough of that abortion!'—which means, as you know, a sentence of death."

"The Justice of God is hanging over Augusta," said Vinicius. "But why do you tell me this?"

"Because, occupied with her own misfortune, she will probably abandon her vengeance against you, and so prove more easy to influence. I will see her to-night, and speak to her."

"I thank you, Petronius. You do indeed bring me good news."

"Now take a bath and some rest. Your lips are blue, and you look a mere shadow of your former self."

"Have you heard when the first morning games are to begin?" inquired Vinicius.

"Within ten days. However, the other prisons will be emptied before the Mamertine prison is tapped, so the situation is not wholly desperate."

In that particular Petronius made a statement in which he himself did not believe; for, from the moment when Nero had answered Aliturus' request with the phrase in which he likened himself to Brutus, Lygia had been lost beyond recall. Also, out of pity for Vinicius, Petronius had omitted another item of news which he had gleaned at Senecio's—namely, the item that Cæsar and Tigellinus had decided to select a few of the most beautiful Christian

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virgins for their own personal pleasure and that of their friends, and to hand over the rest, on the day of the games, to the Prætorians and the wild beast keepers. He knew that in any case Vinicius was determined not to survive Lygia; wherefore he preferred to strengthen hope in the young tribune—partly out of pity, and partly out of the refinement of an æsthete; since, if Vinicius was to die, he ought to die handsome—not with his face marred with nights of insomnia.

"To-day," said Petronius, "I will speak to Augusta something after this fashion: Save Lygia for Vinicius' sake, and I will save Rufus for yours. And I think it will issue as we wish. A word in season to Ahenobarbus can save or can ruin any one. In any case we shall gain time by this means."

"I thank you," said Vinicius.

"The best way in which you can thank me is to take food and rest. By Athene, even Odysseus, in his moments of difficulty, never forgot to eat and to sleep. Probably you have spent the whole night in the prison?"

"No. When, this morning, I tried to enter I was informed that orders had been given that no one should be admitted. Try, therefore, to ascertain whether those orders are for to-day only or are to hold good until the date of the games."

"I will ascertain that to-night. And now I am going to retire, even should Helios descend to the Cimmerian regions by mistake. I advise you to follow my example."

So they separated—Vinicius repairing to the library to write his letter to Lygia. This letter he carried to the Christian centurion in person. The soldier entered the prison, and soon reappeared.

"Lygia," he said, "sends you greeting. As for the remainder of her reply, I will let you have it to-day without fail."

Vinicius felt unwilling to return home, so seated himself upon a boundary stone to await the letter. The sun had mounted high in the heavens, and crowds of people were flocking to the Forum by way of the Clivus Argentarius. Hucksters were calling out their wares, soothsayers were offering their services to passers-by, and citizens were walking with deliberate steps towards the rostra—either to hear the orators of the day or to tell one another the latest news. As the heat increased, crowds of loungers betook themselves to the porticoes of the temples, whence flocks of pigeons kept issuing with great flapping of wings and much gleaming of white feathers against the sunlight and the blue sky.

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The light, the hubbub, and the heat soon combined with bodily weariness to make Vinicius' eyelids drop; until at length the shoutings of some boys who were playing *mora* by his side, added to the measured tramp of the soldiers, lulled him to sleep. More than once he awoke, raised himself, and looked towards the prison; but finally he laid his head upon a ridge in the stone, heaved a sigh like a child which is growing drowsy after a long fit of weeping, and fell asleep in earnest.

Soon there came dreams. It seemed to be night time, and he was carrying Lygia in his arms through an unknown vineyard, while in front of them was walking Pomponia with a lantern in her hand. Then a voice like the voice of Petronius cried to him from afar, "Return, return!" but he paid no attention to the voice, and followed Pomponia until they had arrived at a hut, on the threshold of which stood Peter. Then he, Vinicius, showed Lygia to the Apostle, and said: "We have just come from the Circus, my lord, but cannot awake her. Do you arouse her from sleep." But Peter replied: "Christ Himself shall come and awake her from her slumbers."

Next the dream-pictures became confused. He could see Nero, and Poppæa carrying in her arms the little Rufius with his wounded head, and Tigellinus scattering ashes upon tables laden with delicate meats, and Vitellius devouring the meats, and a crowd of other Augustans partaking of a banquet. He himself was seated beside Lygia, but between the tables there kept prowling lions which had their tawny manes dripping with blood. Lygia was beseeching him to take her away, but he was sunk in torpor so that he could not lift his hand. At length the dreams grew still more chaotic, and finally, everything became swallowed up in darkness.

From this profound slumber he was awakened by the heat of the sun, as well as by a shouting which had suddenly arisen near the spot where he was seated. Rubbing his eyes, he perceived that the street was swarming with people, while a couple of couriers in yellow tunics were driving back the populace with cries and blows, in order to clear a passage for a splendid litter which was being borne along by four gigantic Egyptian slaves.

In that litter there was seated a man dressed in white—a man whose face was nevertheless indistinguishable, owing to the fact that he had his eyes bent upon a roll of papyrus, in which he seemed to be reading something with great attention.

"Way for the noble Augustan!" cried the couriers; but the street was so blocked with people that for a moment

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or two the litter had to stop. Thereupon the Augustan let fall the papyrus-roll, and put out his head.

"Clear away those rascals for me!" he shouted. "Yes, and very quickly too!"

Suddenly he caught sight of Vinicius, and promptly raised the roll of paper to the level of his eyes. As for Vinicius, he passed his hand over his face, thinking that he must still be dreaming.

For in the litter there was seated Chilo!

The couriers had cleared the road, and the Egyptians were just about to resume their march, when the young tribune, who in a twinkling had apprised many things which, before, had seemed to him inexplicable, approached the litter.

"Hail, Chilo!" he said.

"Young man," replied the Greek with dignity as he strove to impart to his face an appearance of calmness which he was far from feeling in his soul, "young man, I salute you, but do not detain me, since I must hasten on my way to the house of my friend, the noble Petronius."

Vinicius leant against the edge of the litter, bent over towards Chilo, and, looking him straight in the eyes, said in a strangled voice:

"You sold Lygia!"

"By the Colossus of Memnon!" cried the other in terror. Yet in Vinicius' eyes there was no sign of a threat, and the old Greek soon got the better of his fears. He reflected that he was under the protection of Cæsar and Tigellinus (the two powers before whom all men were trembling), that he was surrounded by sturdy slaves, and that the Vinicius who was standing there was an unarmed man whose face was sunken, and body bent, with anguish.

At the thought he recovered his insolence. Fixing upon Vinicius his round, bloodshot eyes, he muttered:

"And *you*—when I was dying of hunger you had me flogged!"

For a moment both were silent. Then Vinicius' strangled voice spoke again.

"I was unjust, Chilo," it said.

The Greek threw up his head, and, snapping his fingers with disdain, said haughtily, so that all might hear:

"My friend, if you have any request to make of me, come to my house on the Esquiline in the morning; for it is then that, after my bath, I receive my acquaintances and clients."

And he signed to the Egyptians to raise the litter, while the couriers cried as they whirled their staves around:

"Way for the litter of the noble Chilo Chilonides! Way, way, make way!"

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XIV

IN her long and hastily written letter Lygia said farewell for ever to Vinicius. She now knew, she continued, that no one might visit the prison, and that she should see him only in the arena; whither she begged he would come on the appointed day, in order that for the last time her eyes might behold him.

"Whether Christ deliver me now, or only through death, matters not," she wrote. "In any case He has promised me to you by the mouth of the Apostle, and I am yours already."

Then she went on to urge Vinicius not to regret her, nor to let himself give way to sorrow. Death could not break the ties of plighted troth. With the confidence of a child she assured him that immediately after her agony in the arena she would tell Christ that her betrothed, her Marcus, had been left behind in Rome, and that he was longing for her with all his heart; whereupon, she thought, Christ would allow her soul to return to him for a moment, that she might show him that she was alive, and remembered the agony no more, and was happy.

Indeed, the whole letter breathed happiness and hope. Only one desire did it express with regard to things on earth—and that was that Vinicius should remove her body from the spoliarium, and bury her, as his wife, in the tomb in which he himself would one day rest.

He read this letter with a breaking heart. Yet it seemed to him impossible that Lygia should perish in the jaws of wild beasts, or that Christ should refuse to have pity upon her. On returning home he replied that every day he meant to come and wait under the walls of the tullianum, in full expectation of seeing those walls broken down by Christ. Even in the Circus, he urged, Christ could save her. The Great Apostle was sending up prayer to that effect, and the hour of her deliverance was at hand.

This letter the converted centurion arranged to convey to its destination, and when, on the morrow, Vinicius arrived at the prison the centurion left the ranks, and advanced to meet him.

"Listen to me, my lord," he said. "Christ, who has tried your heart so sorely, has also shown you His favour. Last night there came to the prison some freedmen of Cæsar's and the Prefect's, in order to select for their masters' pleasure some Christian virgins; and though they inquired for your betrothed, the Lord had laid upon her the fever from

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which the prisoners in the tullianum are dying, and they were prevented from taking her. By eventide she had lost consciousness; but, thanks to the Saviour, the same sickness which has saved her from outrage may also save her from death."

Vinicius grasped the soldier's arm to prevent himself from falling. The centurion continued:

"Render thanks, therefore, unto the Lord for His goodness. These men had actually seized Lygia, and were putting her to the question, when they perceived that she was ill, and relinquished her. Perhaps she will now be surrendered to yourself, and Christ will restore her health."

"You speak truly, centurion. Christ who has saved her from shame can save her also from death." Vinicius' voice was very tender.

Until evening he remained near the walls of the prison; after which he returned home, and told his servants to seek Linus, and to carry him to one of his (Vinicius') suburban villas. Petronius also decided to take a further step. Though he had paid one visit to Augusta, he went to see her a second time, and found her by the bedside of the little Rufius. The child was in delirium, for his skull had been fractured: consequently Poppæa was so taken up with her grief that at first she refused to hear a single word concerning Lygia and Vinicius. Petronius, however, contrived to overawe her.

"You have offended a new and unknown deity," he said. "It appears that you worship the Jehovah of the Jews. But the Christians aver that Christ is Jehovah's son. Ask yourself, therefore, if you are not being pursued by the anger of the father. May it not be that the joint vengeance of those deities has fallen upon you, and that the life of the little Rufius is hanging upon your conduct in the future?"

"What do you wish me to do?"

"To appease the angry deities."

"In what manner?"

"Lygia is ill. Use, therefore, your influence with Cæsar and Tigellinus to have her restored to Vinicius."

"Do you suppose that that lies in my power?" asked Poppæa desperately.

"Well, if it does not, another thing lies in your power. Should Lygia recover, she will have to meet death in the arena. Go you, therefore, to the temple of Vesta, and demand that the Head Virgin shall chance to be near the tullianum when the prisoners are led out to death. Let her demand that this maiden be set at liberty. Surely the Virgin will not refuse you this request?"

"But if Lygia should die of fever?"

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"Well, the Christians assert that Christ, though quick to punish, is also just. That being so, perhaps you could appease Him by intention alone?"

"First let Him show me, by a sign, that He will save Rufius."

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"I have not come here as Christ's ambassador," he said, "but simply to tell you this: that it is best to be on good terms with *all* the gods, whether they be Roman or foreign."

"I will go to Vesta," said Poppæa brokenly.

Petronius drew a long breath.

"At least I have gained *something*," he thought to himself. On returning home, he said to Vinicius:

"Ask of your God that Lygia shall not die in prison: for, should she live, the Head Vestal will herself deliver her. Augusta in person is going to petition the Head to that effect."

Vinicius looked at him with eyes that were glittering with fever, and replied:

"Christ will deliver her."

The same evening Poppæa, who, to save Rufius, was ready to offer hecatombs to every god in the universe, repaired to the Vestal sanctuary in the Forum—entrusting, meanwhile, the guardianship of the child to the faithful Sylvia, an old woman who, in her time, had been Poppæa's own nurse.

Unfortunately, the fate of the infant had been already decided upon at the Palatine; and hardly had the Empress's litter passed out through the main gate of the palace than two freedmen of Cæsar's entered the room where the young Rufius was lying. One of them seized and gagged the aged Sylvia, while the other one killed her by striking her over the head with a bronze sphinx.

The child, of course, did not understand what was happening, but smiled at the men with half-closed eyes, as though he were trying to recognise them. Removing the old nurse's girdle, the assassins threw it around his neck, and pulled it tight. The boy cried out, "Mother, mother!" and expired.

That done, the men wrapped him in a cloak, and galloped for Ostia, where they cast the body into the sea.

Poppæa, not finding the Head Virgin at home (with the other Vestals, she had gone to pay a visit to Vatinus), returned to the Palatine. At the sight of the empty cradle and the already stiffening corpse of Sylvia she fainted. Recovering, she burst into lamentation, and her wild cries made the palace ring throughout that night and the morrow.

On the third day Cæsar commanded her to attend a

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banquet. Donning her mantle of amethyst, she did as he had bidden her, and sat out the festival with a face of stone—a flaxen-haired mute whose mien was at once marvellously beautiful and sinister as that of the angel of death.

XV

BEFORE the Flavians built the Coliseum the majority of the Roman amphitheatres were constructed of wood. Also, nearly all of them had been burnt in the late fire, and therefore, in order to give the games which he had promised the people, Nero ordered a number of new amphitheatres to be erected—among them a gigantic Circus for the construction of which huge trunks of trees were brought from the slopes of the Atlas Mountains. Upon this Circus thousands of artisans worked day and night—the plans having been prepared by the celebrated architects Severus and Celer. Indeed, the process of building and fitting was carried on without a break. Wonders were told of the pillars—inlaid with bronze, amber, ivory, mother-of-pearl, and tortoiseshell—which it was to contain. Also, canals filled with ice-cold water from the mountains were to run beneath the benches, for the purpose of maintaining a comfortable temperature throughout the building; while an immense purple velarium, or canopy, was to afford shelter from the sun. Between the rows of benches there were to be placed braziers for the diffusion of Arabic perfumes; and an ingenious device to cause sprinklings of saffron and of verberna to descend upon the heads of the spectators was installed.

On the day when the morning games were to begin throngs of people waited from dawn for the doors of the Circus to open—listening with delight, meanwhile, to the roaring of the lions, the growling of the panthers, and the howling of the dogs. The animals had not been fed for two days, and now bleeding quarters of meat were being dangled before their cages, to excite their fury and hunger. Sometimes, indeed, the storm of howls and roars from the beasts made it impossible for those waiting at the doors of the Circus to hear themselves speak.

At dawn, also, there arose, even in the vicinity of the Circus itself, the deep, calm sound of Christian hymns. Men listened in astonishment, repeating, "It is the Christians, it is the Christians!" The reason was that large numbers of the latter had been transferred to the Circus overnight—persons drawn not from the same prison in each case, as

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had been the original plan, but from different houses of incarceration. The voices of these men, women, and children, as they sang their morning hymns, were so numerous that people began to declare that the beasts would grow weary and satiated before they could tear such a multitude of victims to pieces; while others asserted that so great a number of victims in the ring would prevent concentration of attention, and permit no one to enjoy the spectacle comfortably. In proportion as the hour for opening the entrance-ways approached, the throng grew merry and more animated, and took to discussing matters of the Circus. Here and there groups would gather together to praise the relative aptness of lions or of tigers for tearing human beings in pieces, and to lay wagers on the same. Also, people talked of the gladiators who were to precede the Christians in the arena. Some lauded the Samnites or the Gauls, while others pinned their faith upon the *mir-millones*, the Thracians, or the *retiarii*. As the morning wore on, detachments of these fighters, headed by their trainers, the *lanistæ*, began to gravitate towards the amphitheatre; but, to avoid tiring themselves before they should be wanted, they marched without arms, and often completely naked, except for garlands of flowers on their heads and green branches in their hands. For the most part young, handsome, and full of life, they looked so splendid in the morning light, with their formidable bodies shining with oil until they almost resembled blocks of granite, that the people, ever prone to admire beauty of form, broke out into frequent applause, and called aloud their names, with which every one was familiar. "Hail, Furnius!" could be heard—"Hail, Leo! Hail, Maximus! Hail, Diomedes!" Young girls threw looks of love at them, and they, in their turn, singled out the fairest of the maidens, and as though they had not a care upon their minds, addressed compliments to these damsels, threw them kisses, and called out, "Take me before death shall do so!" At length the gladiators disappeared within portals whence more than one of their number was never again to issue.

Every moment fresh sights kept attracting the attention of the mob. Behind the gladiators came the *mastigophori*, whose function it was to lash and urge on the combatants. Next there passed by trains of mules, dragging towards the *spoliarium*, or place where the dead bodies were to be cast, carts stacked with coffins. The sight of these particularly delighted the people, since from the number of the shells they could form an estimate of the immense proportions of the coming spectacle. The carts of coffins were followed by persons dressed to represent Charon or

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Mercury, who were charged with the duty of finally dispatching the wounded; by ushers who were to preserve order in the Circus, and to show spectators to their seats; by slaves who were to serve refreshments; and by the detachment of Prætorian Guards which always attended the Emperor in the amphitheatre. Then the doors of public admission were opened, and the people swarmed in. Yet so enormous was the multitude that it took several hours to filter into the building; while, at the sound of the doors being opened, the wild beasts in the vivaria roared more loudly than ever, in excitement at scenting so many human beings massed together. In fact, until the audience had settled into their seats, the roar of the multitude was as the roar of the ocean in a storm.

Presently there arrived also the Prefect of Rome, with his bodyguard, and then litters of Senators, Consuls, Prætors, Ædiles, palace functionaries, officers of the Prætorian Guard, patricians, and fine ladies. The gilding of the litters, the white or coloured robes and ear-rings, jewels and plumes of their occupants, the axes of the lictors—all combined to reflect the sunlight from a myriad glittering points.

From the various parts of the Circus the populace greeted these superior dignitaries with acclamations. Minor detachments of the Prætorians next made their appearance, but the priests of the various pagan sanctuaries arrived later, with, behind them, the sacred Virgins of Vesta, borne aloft in litters, and preceded by lictors.

Nothing more was needed for the spectacle to begin but the presence of Cæsar; and since the latter was anxious not to abuse the people's patience, but, on the contrary, desired to win the public favour by his punctuality, he soon made his appearance in company with Poppæa and the Augustans—the latter including Petronius and Vinicius, who were riding together in the same litter.

The attendants and servants generally of the amphitheatre were all in the pay of Vinicius; and it had been agreed upon that the keepers of the wild beasts should conceal Lygia in an obscure corner of the underground passages until fall of night, when she should be handed over to the young tribune's steward, who would at once start with her for the Alban Hills. Petronius, who was in the secret, had further advised Vinicius to show himself openly in the amphitheatre, and subsequently to escape thence by favour of the military on duty; whereafter he was to make his way into the dungeons, in order that he might prevent any possible mistake by himself pointing out Lygia to the gaolers.

This he succeeded in doing, but, on the gaolers opening

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the wicket, one of them—a man named Syrus—said to him as he led the way towards the Christians:

“My lord, I know not if you will find her whom you seek; for though we have made inquiries for a young girl named Lygia, no one has answered to the name. However, it is possible that the prisoners do not fully trust us.”

So saying, Syrus opened a door, and they entered a vast hall which was not only low, but very dark, since light gained admission merely through barred slits which divided it from the arena. At first Vinicius could distinguish nothing: he could hear only the confused murmur of voices in the hall itself, and the clamour which came from the people in the amphitheatre. After a moment, however, his eyes grew more accustomed to the darkness, and he saw before him groups of weird beings who looked like wolves or bears. These were Christians who had been sewn up in the skins of wild beasts. Some were praying in a standing position; others in a kneeling. Here and there long hair straggling over the fur revealed the fact that the victim was a woman. Mothers, looking like she-wolves, were holding equally hirsute infants in their arms. Yet under the pelts of wild beasts there could be seen clear faces and eyes which shone in the darkness with a sort of feverish joy. It was manifest that the majority of these people were filled with an idea which rendered them insensible to anything that might befall. Some whom Vinicius questioned regarding Lygia made no answer, but looked at him with the eyes of sleepers suddenly awakened. Others smiled at him with a finger to their lips, or pointed to the bars through which faint beams of light were straggling. The only weeping to be heard came from children who were terrified by the din from the wild beasts, and by the beast-like aspect of their parents.

As Vinicius walked beside Syrus he kept examining faces, peering about, and asking questions. At times, also, he stumbled over the bodies of persons who had fainted in the stifling atmosphere. Suddenly he stopped, for he seemed to have caught the sound of a familiar voice. Retracing his steps, and making his way through the crowd, he approached the person who had spoken; and as he did so a beam of light fell upon the head of a man in whom Vinicius recognised, despite the covering of wolf's skin, the attenuated, but implacable, Crispus.

“Repent you of your sins,” he was saying; “for the hour is at hand. In truth I say unto you that he who thinks that he will be redeemed by his martyrdom is committing a sin the more, and will be cast into fire everlasting. Every sin which is committed does but renew the agony of the

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Lord: how, therefore, can you dare to conceive that the agony which is awaiting you can equal that which was endured by the Redeemer? The just and the unjust will die, this day, the same death; but the Lord will recognise His own. Woe unto you, for the teeth of the lions can destroy your flesh, but not your sins, nor yet your account with God. He has shown you sufficient mercy in that He suffered Himself to be nailed to the Cross. Henceforth you will behold Him only as the Great Judge. You, therefore, who think to blot out your iniquities by your agony do blaspheme against the justice of God, and will be cast the more into the abyss. Now that you are about to come face to face with the dread Judge before whom even the righteous will find but sorry grace, repent you of your sins, for Hell is awaiting you."

A shudder passed over Vinicius' form. Though hitherto he had rested all his hopes upon the mercy of Christ, he had just heard it said that even death in the arena would not suffice to gain such mercy! Yet with the swiftness and the brilliancy of lightning there passed through his mind also a thought that it was in very different fashion that the Apostle Peter had spoken to those who were about to die. At the same time, the terrible threats of the fanatical Crispus, added to the darkness of the hall, the imminence of execution, and the aspect of the victims clothed for death, filled Vinicius' heart with terror. Together these things seemed to him a thousand times more frightful and more atrocious even than the most sanguinary battle in which he had taken part. Remembering, however, that at any moment the gratings might be opened, he set himself to call for Lygia and Ursus, in the hope that, in default of them, some one would respond who knew him.

And, true enough, a man clad in the skin of a bear plucked him by the toga, and said:

"My lord, they have been left behind in the prison. I was the last to be brought out, and saw the maiden lying sick upon her bed."

"Who are you?" asked Vinicius.

"The quarrynian in whose hut you were baptised by the Apostle Peter. I have been in prison three days, and am to die to-day."

Vinicius drew a deep breath.

"Do you remember, my lord," continued the quarryman, "that it was I who guided you through Cornelius' vineyard, when the Apostle was preaching to us in an out-building?"

"Yes, I remember," replied Vinicius.

"I saw him again later, on the evening of the day before

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I was thrown into prison. He gave me his blessing, and told me that he would be present in the amphitheatre to bless also those who were to be put to death. That I may behold him at the moment when death comes to me—that I may see him make the sign of the cross—is my constant prayer. It will be easy for me to die then! If, my lord, you know where he is now, I beseech you to tell me!”

Vinicius lowered his voice, and replied:

“He is among Petronius’ attendants, disguised as a slave. I know not where they are sitting, but when I regain my own seat I will seek them. Look in my direction when you enter the arena. I will rise and turn my head towards Peter and those who are with him, and then you will be able to find him with your own eyes.”

“I thank you, my lord. May peace be with you!”

“And to you may the Saviour be merciful!”

“Amen!”

Vinicius left the dungeon, and returned to the amphitheatre, where he resumed his place beside Petronius among the Augustans.

“Is she there?” asked Petronius.

“No. She has remained behind in prison.”

“Then listen to another idea which has just occurred to me. But as you listen keep glancing in the direction of Nigidia, so that it may be thought that we are discussing her head-dress. Tigellinus and Chilo have their eyes upon us. Well, my idea is this. Have Lygia put into a coffin to-night, and removed for dead. The rest you can guess.”

“Yes,” was Vinicius’ hurried reply.

This conversation was interrupted by Tullius Senecio, who said to them as he leant over in their direction:

“Do you know whether or not weapons are to be allowed the Christians?”

“No, we know not,” replied Petronius.

“Well, for my part I should have preferred that to be done,” continued Senecio; “since otherwise the arena will come soon to resemble a butcher’s slaughter-house. But what a splendid amphitheatre it is!”

And, truly enough, the effect presented was magnificent. The lower benches appeared to be covered with snow, so compact was their white swarin of togas; while above them, on a gilded balcony, Cæsar, with a string of diamonds around his neck and a crown of gold on his head, was seated. Beside him he had Augusta, at once beautiful and menacing; while a little distance away were the Vestal Virgins, high dignitaries, Senators in embroidered mantles, military commanders in brilliant armour, and all the might and magnificence of Rome. Behind, again, sat the knights,

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while higher up, in every tier, there undulated a sea of dark human heads, backed by lines of masts around which were twined garlands of roses, lilies, creepers, ivy, and vine leaves. Everywhere people were talking loudly, asking questions, singing, applauding clever sallies, bursting into a roar of laughter which rolled from tier to tier, and stamping their feet to hasten the commencement of the spectacle. This stamping of feet resembled distant thunder, and never for a moment ceased. At length the Prefect, after making a tour of the arena with his splendid retinue, gave the signal by dropping a scarf. In answer there came a cry of "Aah!" uttered in unison by thousands of throats from every part of the vast arena.

Usually the spectacle began with the chasing of wild beasts—a sport in which sundry barbarians of the North and the South greatly excelled; but this time the opening item was furnished by *andabatae*—gladiators who, furnished with helmets lacking eyeholes, fought blindfold. Of these warriors a dozen or so advanced into the arena, and began to cleave the empty air with their swords, while *mastigophori* urged them towards one another with long forks. This contemptible exhibition the elegant portion of the audience watched with indifference. On the other hand, the populace derived considerable amusement from the gladiators' awkward movements; and whenever two of the combatants met back to back, loud laughter would ring forth, and shouts of "To the right!" or "To the left!"—shouts frequently uttered on purpose to mislead the warriors. A few pairs, however, succeeded in getting to close quarters, and then the struggle became more sanguinary as the more excited of the combatants threw away their shields, and, grasping one another's left hands, began a fight to the death with their right. Those who fell raised their fingers to plead for the audience's pity, but, as a rule, the people demanded the death of such wounded men, especially when they happened to be *andabatae*—gladiators, whose faces being covered, had remained unknown to the spectators. Gradually the number of combatants grew smaller, until there survived only two. These were guided in one another's direction, met, fell upon the sand, and mutually stabbed one another to death. Then arena attendants removed the bodies, while Greek youths raked over the arena, in order to cover up the marks of blood. Lastly, saffron leaves were sprinkled over all.

Next followed a graver combat—one which excited the interest of the fashionable throng as much as it did that of the mob. Also, it was one upon which young patricians often wagered or lost their last sesterlius. As soon as ever

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it had begun, tablets were passed round the audience, in order that spectators might inscribe thereon the names of their favourites, and the amount that each man cared to risk upon the gladiator of his choice. Veteran champions who had previously appeared in the arena and won victories gained the greatest number of backers, but certain gamblers staked considerable sums also upon new and unknown gladiators—hoping thereby to make an enormous profit. Cæsar himself laid wagers, and, with him, priests, Vestal Virgins, Senators, knights, and the people generally. Not infrequently the latter, after losing their all, would stake, in addition, their personal freedom.

As the strident tones of the trumpets rang out, a tense and profound silence fell upon the assemblage, and thousands of eyes fixed themselves upon an enormous door which a man dressed as Charon approached and, amid a profound stillness, struck three times with a hammer, as though to summon to death the men who were concealed behind it. The two leaves of the door opened slowly, and from the recesses of a darkened space within there streamed forth into the brilliantly lighted arena a swarm of gladiators.

Thracian gladiators, mirmillones, Samnites, and Gauls—all of them marched in separate groups of twenty-five, heavily armed. Next came retiarii, holding a net in one hand and a trident in the other. At once from some of the benches there arose a fusillade of clapping, which presently swelled into a vast and continuous roar of applause. From top to bottom of every tier there could be seen only inflamed faces, gesticulating hands, and widely opened mouths. The gladiators made a tour of the arena with a regular, elastic tread and much glittering of weapons and rich cuirasses, and then halted before the Imperial balcony—a cohort proud, calm, and splendid. Next, the penetrating sound of a horn stilled the uproar, and, raising heads and eyes, and extending their right hands towards Cæsar, the warriors chanted in a drawling monotone:

" Ave, Cæsar Imperator!
Morituri te salutant! " ¹

Then in a twinkling they separated, and stationed themselves at the margin of the arena. They were to attack one another in detachments, but before they did so the most famous of the fencers had the right to engage in a series of single combats—a form of fighting which afforded greater opportunities of displaying individual courage and address. From the Gallic detachment there issued Lanio, a champion

¹ " Hail, Cæsar Imperator!
We, about to die, salute thee! "

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well known to habitués of the amphitheatre as the victor in many previous encounters. With his huge helmet and the cuirass which encircled his formidable torso, he looked, in the sunshine which was flooding the sand of the arena, like an immense glittering beetle. To meet him there advanced the no less famous retiarius Calendio.

Among the spectators wagers began to circulate.

"Five hundred sestertii upon the Gaul!"

"Five hundred upon Calendio!"

"By Hercules, a thousand!"

"Two thousand!"

On reaching the centre of the arena, the Gaul fell back, with his sword in line and his head lowered to observe his adversary through the eyelets of his visor; while Calendio—light, statuesque, and stark naked save for a loin-cloth—began to revolve around his massive antagonist, making graceful passes with his net as he did so, raising and lowering his trident, and singing his habitual chant of

"Non te peto; piscem peto.
Quid me fugis, Galle?"¹

The Gaul, however, so far from fleeing, held his ground, and set himself to change his position in such a way that he always had his enemy in front of him. In his body and monstrous head there now seemed to be a suggestion of the terrible—a suggestion of the fact that that mighty bulk, enclosed in steel, was engendering the attack of a thunderbolt.

Ever the retiarius kept approaching or retiring by sudden leaps, as well as causing his trident to flutter so rapidly that the eye could scarcely follow its movements. Several times the teeth of the trident rang upon the shield, but the Gaul never flinched—thus giving proof of his gigantic strength. His whole attention seemed to be concentrated, not upon the trident, but upon the net, which kept fluttering around his head like a bird of ill-omen. With bated breath the audience followed the splendid fencing of these gladiators; until at length Lanio chose a moment to rush in upon his adversary, who, leaping aside under the levelled sword, turned, straightened his arms, and again launched his net. The Gaul faced about, caught the net on his shield, and, like his adversary, leapt backwards. The audience roared applause, and new wagers were laid. Cæsar himself, who had been talking to Rubria and paying small attention to the spectacle, now turned his head in the direction of the arena.

Again the gladiators engaged in combat, but with such

¹ "I seek not thee; I seek a fish.
Why fleest thou me, O Gaul?"

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dexterity, such precision of movement, that at times it might have been thought that for them it was not a question of life or death, but a mere opportunity of displaying their address. Twice Lanio evaded the net; after which he began to give ground in the direction of the edge of the arena. Thereupon those who had staked wagers upon him cried out (since they did not wish to see him rest), "To the attack!" The gladiator obeyed them by again assuming the offensive. Suddenly the retiarius' arm spouted blood, and his net fell. Lanio collected himself on his haunches, and sprang forward to administer the final stroke; but at the same moment Calendio, who had feigned to be unable to continue wielding his net, leant sideways, evaded the point of the sword, and, slipping his trident between the knees of his adversary, brought him to the ground. The other tried to rise, but instantly became enmeshed in the fatal net, in which his every movement served the more to entangle his hands and feet. Finally a stab from the trident nailed him to the earth.

With a supreme effort the fallen man raised himself upon one arm, wriggled round, and tried to rise. It was in vain. Again he raised to his head the failing hand from which the sword had fallen. Then he rolled over on his face. With the prongs of the trident Calendio pinned the man's neck to the ground, and, leaning with both hands upon the shaft of his weapon, turned towards Cæsar's balcony.

The entire Circus was rocking with the roar of human voices. For those who had staked wagers upon Calendio the latter was, at that moment, even greater than Cæsar; which fact itself caused all animosity against Lanio to vanish from their bosoms, seeing that, at the price of his blood, he had filled their purses. As for the mob in general, its wishes in the matter were mixed. On every tier as many signals for mercy could be seen as signals for death. The retiarius, however, looked only towards the balcony on which Cæsar and the Vestals were seated as he awaited their decision.

Unfortunately for Lanio, Nero did not like him, for the reason that of late—that is to say, before the fire—he had wagered against the defeated gladiator, and had lost considerable sums to Licinius. Consequently he now extended his hand from the edge of the balcony—thumb turned downwards. Instantly the Vestals imitated his example. Calendio knelt with one knee upon the breast of the Gaul, drew from its sheath a dagger, and, opening his adversary's armour up to the height of the neck, plunged into Lanio's throat his triangular-bladed weapon. It

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entered to the hilt; and as it did so a few voices cried out: "Peractum est!" With a convulsion or two like those of a bullock which is being slaughtered Lanio drummed the sand with his heels, rolled over, and lay motionless. There remained no need for the official who was dressed as Mercury to ascertain, by the test of the hot iron, whether he still lived.

At once the corpse was removed, and other pairs of gladiators made their appearance; after which there came a battle between whole detachments of these men. In the battle the mob took part with heart and soul and voice. It shouted, it roared, it whistled, it clapped its hands, it laughed, it egged on the combatants, it went delirious with joy, while all the time the gladiators, divided into two parties, struggled with one another in mad abandon, with thorax pressed to thorax, bodies entangled in a mortal embrace, tremendous limbs cracking at the joints, swords wallowing in breasts and bellies, and blanched lips vomiting torrents of blood. Towards the close of the combat some of the novices became seized with a panic so unbearable that, breaking away from the *mêlée*, they fled in disorder; whereupon mastigophori met them with loaded scourges, and drove them back into the thick of the fighting. Soon the sand became strewn with corpses as at every moment fresh bodies—naked or clad in steel—augmented the lines of dead warriors which radiated outwards like a sheaf. Over these bodies there fought the living as they charged against weapons and steel bucklers, cut their feet upon broken swords, and fell to the ground. The mob grew mad and drunken with the orgy of death. It breathed it in, it sated its eyes with it, it gladly sucked into its lungs the exhalations from the slaughter.

At length the vanquished had, almost to a man, been slain. Only a few wounded combatants were kneeling or staggering about in the centre of the arena, and stretching out hands for mercy to the audience. To the successful warriors garlands and boughs of olive were distributed as prizes. That done, there ensued a brief interval which, by orders of the all-powerful Cæsar, was converted into a public banquet. Braziers charged with perfumes were lighted, men with syringes sprinkled the crowd with a fine mixture of saffron and violet-powder, and a general distribution was made of roast meats, sweet cakes, olives, and other fruits. The people ate, chattered, and applauded Cæsar, as an inducement to him to be even more liberal in the future. And, true enough, the desired result followed; for, as soon as hunger and thirst had been satisfied, hundreds of slaves made their appearance with baskets of gifts. Into these

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baskets Greek youths dressed as Cupids plunged their hands, and scattered articles of every sort among the spectators; and when lottery tickets also were distributed there began a riot in which men crowded and trampled one another, called for help, sprang over the rows of seats, and got stifled in the terrible crush. The reason of this was that whoever drew a lucky number became the potential winner of a house and garden, or of a slave, or of a splendid costume, or of a wild beast (which he or she would be able to re-sell to the amphitheatre). The disorder grew until the Prætorian Guards were forced to interfere; for after every distribution of tickets people began to be carried out with broken arms or legs, while some were trampled to death in the rush.

The wealthy, however, took no part in this scramble for lottery tickets—the Augustans, in particular, finding a superior diversion in the spectacle presented by Chilo's useless efforts to prove to the public that he could equal any man in his ability to view unmoved the sight of fighting and of shedding of blood. In vain did the unfortunate man frown, in vain did he bite his lips and clench his fists until the nails bit into the palms. His Hellenic temperament, added to his personal cowardice, could not stomach such spectacles calmly. His face had turned white, his forehead had broken out in beads of sweat. At length, with eyes turned inwards, chattering teeth, and lips which were perfectly livid, he sank back in his seat—his form twitching with spasmodic convulsions.

The first part of the spectacle having come to an end, the people began to leave their places, in order to stretch their legs in the corridors and converse.

"Well, Greek?" said Vatinius to Chilo as he plucked the old man by the beard. "Is the sight of a torn skin so unbearable to you?"

Chilo smiled a wry smile which disclosed the only two yellow teeth which now remained to him.

"My father was not a cobbler," he retorted. "I had no one to teach me how to repair leather."

"Macte! Habet!"¹ cried several voices. Nevertheless, others joined in the raillery.

"It is not his fault that he has a cheese for a heart," cried Senecio.

"Nor is it your fault that you have a pig's bladder for a head," retorted Chilo.

"Perhaps you will yet become a gladiator, Chilo. You would do well in the arena if you were armed with, say, a net."

¹ "Good! He has scored there!"

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" Were I to catch *you* in my net, I should have caught a stinking brute indeed! "

" And what of the Christians? " asked Festus of Liguria.
" Should you not like to be a hound and worry them? "

" I would rather be that than your brother! "

" Away with you, Mæotian leper! "

" Away with *you*, Ligurian mule! "

" Evidently your skin is itching. Pray do not ask me to scratch it. "

" Scratch your own skin! Yet, were you to rid it of its ringworm, you would have rid it of what is best in you. "

Thus the bantering went on—Chilo, amid general laughter, returning abuse for abuse, while Cæsar, at intervals, clapped his hands, shouted " Macte! " and incited the banterers to further efforts. At length Petronius approached the Greek, and, tapping him on the shoulder with his light cane of carved ivory, said coldly:

" Very good, philosopher. But you have made a great mistake. The gods created you to slit purses; whereas you have cast yourself for the part of a demon. That is why you will never play the part to the end. "

The old man looked at him with his yellow eyes, but could not, at the moment, find a retort come ready to the tip of his tongue. At length with a sort of effort he ejaculated:

" Yes, I *shall* play the part to the end. "

At this moment a fanfare of trumpets announced the close of the interval. A general movement followed, as well as the usual series of altercations as to ownership of seats previously occupied by Senators and patricians. Gradually, however, the noise subsided, until perfect silence reigned in the theatre. Meanwhile a number of attendants had entered the arena, and smoothed with rakes the piles of clotted blood and sand which had become formed during the previous item.

It was now to be the turn of the Christians. This " turn " represented a new form of amusement for the populace, and no one knew how the victims would bear themselves. Possibly it would give rise to scenes altogether out of the common. Everywhere on the faces of the audience there was stamped an expression of hostility, since the victims who were to provide the spectacle were the people who had burnt Rome and its ancient treasures, who had drunk the blood of infants, who had poisoned fountains, who had cursed the human race, who had perpetrated nameless crimes. The popular hatred was such that even the most terrible punishments seemed likely to prove inadequate. The only fear was lest the pain inflicted should not correspond to the past misdeeds of the condemned miscreants.

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The sun had now mounted high in the heavens, and its rays, filtering through the purple velarium, were flooding the amphitheatre with blood-coloured light, and causing the sand to glow fiercely. In that light, in those faces, in that expanse of arena which was soon to be filled with human torture and animal fury, there was something appalling. The atmosphere of the scene seemed to be charged with terror and death. The crowd, usually jovial, was growing moody under the influence of the hate-charged silence. On every face could be discerned a complete absence of pity.

The Prefect made a sign; whereupon the old man who represented Charon entered the arena, crossed it slowly, and, amid the brooding stillness, knocked thrice at the great door with his hammer.

Then in the amphitheatre there arose a murmur of "The Christians, the Christians!" The iron hinges creaked, from the underground passages within there came the usual cry of the mastigophori, "Ad arenam!" and in a twinkling the great open space had become peopled with, as it were, a throng of woodland satyrs. All ran forward with a feverish swiftness, and, on reaching the centre of the arena, knelt down behind one another, raising their hands to heaven.

The populace, thinking from this that the victims were imploring mercy, became seized with rage at the sight of such cowardice, and stamped, whistled, threw empty bottles and gnawed bones into the arena, and shouted, "The wild beasts! Let loose the wild beasts!"

But suddenly an unexpected thing happened. From the centre of that throng of skin-clad beings there arose the sound of singing, and for the first time in a Roman amphitheatre there was heard the hymn, "Christus regnat!"

The people stared at one another as the victims sang with eyes uplifted to the velarium. The faces of the victims were pale, but visibly inspired. At length even the mob began to understand that the Christians were not asking for mercy, but saw before them neither the Circus nor the audience nor the Senate nor Caesar. Louder and louder rose the "Christus regnat"; until, from top to bottom, and from end to end, of the countless tiers of spectators, persons began to ask one another, "Who is he, this Christus, who reigns in the mouths of folk who are about to die?"

Then another grating was opened, and into the arena there rushed, with savage bounds, whole packs of dogs—gigantic yellow Molossian hounds from the Peloponnesus, piebald hounds from the Pyrenees, and wolf-like hounds from

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Hibernia—all purposely half-starved, with lank sides and bloodshot eyes. The entire amphitheatre resounded with the barkings and growlings of these beasts. The Christians had finished their hymn, and, kneeling as motionless as though they had been turned to stone, were chanting in unison, "Pro Christo, pro Christo!"

Scenting human beings within the skins of the animals, and taken aback by the absolute calm of the victims, the hounds dared not at first attack them. Some even tried to leap the barriers, while others rushed barking round the arena, as though they were pursuing some invisible quarry. At length the audience grew tired of this. Thousands of throats rang out—some imitating the roaring of wild beasts, others baying like hounds themselves, and others rating the animals in every imaginable tongue. The amphitheatre rocked with the din. At length the maddened hounds rushed towards the kneeling Christians—then drew back with a snapping of their jaws; until finally a large Molossian hound drove his fangs into a woman's shoulder, and bore her to earth with his weight. That done, some scores of hounds bounded into the centre of the group, as though they were entering a breach in a wall; whereupon the audience ceased to shout, and fixed its attention more attentively upon the spectacle. Yet still above the snarls and the growlings of the beasts there rose the plaintive voices of men and women chanting "Pro Christo, pro Christo!" even though the arena was now full of writhing, convulsive heaps of dogs and human beings. Blood came flowing in streams from torn bodies as the hounds wrenched limb from limb. Indeed, the Arabic perfumes with which the amphitheatre had been sweetened were overpowered by the penetrating odour of gory flesh and entrails.

At last only here and there was there to be seen a kneeling figure; and presently even these few became centres of snarling masses of hounds.

At the moment when the Christians entered the arena Vinicius fulfilled his promise to the quarryman by rising and turning his head towards the spot where the Apostle was concealed among Petronius' attendants. Then he reseated himself, and remained gazing at the frightful spectacle without moving, with glassy eyes, with the face of a dead man. At first the thought that the quarryman might have been mistaken, and that Lygia too might be with those poor victims, completely paralysed him; but when he heard the voices chanting "Pro Christo!" when he beheld innumerable victims confessing their faith and glorifying God in the very act of death, another sensation came over

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him—a sensation which, though torturing like the most terrible pain, could not be stifled. The idea had just occurred to him that since Christ Himself had been put to death, and thousands were now perishing in His name, so that blood flowed like water—well, a drop or two more could signify nothing, nothing, and to ask for mercy would be an actual sin. The thought reached his brain from the arena, pervaded him with the death-rattle of every victim, and took final possession of him as he caught the scent of the carnage. Yet still he prayed—prayed with dry lips—“Christ! Christ! Thy Apostle also is praying for her!” At length he lost consciousness, and became oblivious of all around him. In that condition he seemed to see blood mounting like an incoming tide, and surrounding the Circus, and overwhelming the whole of Rome. No longer could he hear the baying of the hounds, nor the clamour of the mob, nor the voices of Augustans crying out, “Chilo has fainted!”

“Chilo has fainted,” repeated Petronius, turning towards the Greek. True enough, the latter, white as a sheet, was sitting with his head thrown backwards and his mouth open, so that he looked like a corpse.

At that moment some new batches of victims, dressed, like the first, in the skins of wild beasts, were being driven into the arena. Like their predecessors, they knelt down. Nevertheless the hounds, which had now reached the end of their strength, refused to rend these new victims. Except for those which sprang upon victims who happened to be nearest them, the pack lay down, raised their blood-stained jowls, and remained panting heavily, with heaving flanks.

Upon this the mob, thoroughly roused, drunk with carnage, and beside itself with delirium, raised strident shouts of “The lions, the lions! Let loose the lions!”

The lions had been reserved for the morrow; but at these spectacles in amphitheatres the mob imposed its will upon every one, including even Cæsar. Caligula alone—a man as insolent as he had been versatile in his whims—had dared to contradict the populace, and even to have it cudgelled; but more often than not even *he* had yielded. As for Nero, applause was more precious to him than all the world besides. Consequently he never thwarted the people, and this time in particular was doing all he could to appease a nation exasperated by the burning of its capital. For that purpose was it that he had attacked the Christians, and laid upon them the blame for the disaster.

That being so, he made a sign for the lions’ den to be opened; upon seeing which, the mob at once grew calmer.

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Harshly did the gratings creak behind which the lions were confined, and at the sight of the great beasts the hounds gave vent to stifled whines, and rushed to the other side of the arena as, one by one, the objects of their terror—huge tawny brutes with ponderous, shaggy heads—entered. Cæsar himself turned his weary face in their direction, and raised his emerald monocle to his eye, in order the better to see them. As for the Augustans, they received the lions with applause, while the populace in general counted them on its fingers, and watched eagerly, to note the impression which they were producing upon the kneeling Christians. The latter were still repeating their "Pro Christo, pro Christo!"—a formula incomprehensible to many among the audience, and annoying to all.

In spite of the process of starvation to which they had been subjected, the lions did not hasten to attack the victims. Apparently the red glare in which the sand was bathed troubled their sight, for they blinked their eyes as though dazzled. Some even stretched their tawny limbs in lazy fashion, while others opened their jaws in yawns, as though on purpose to show their fangs. Gradually, however, the odour of blood from the torn bodies which still littered the arena exercised its effect upon them. Their movements became nervous, their manes began to bristle, and their nostrils emitted loud sniffs. Suddenly one of their number sprang upon the corpse of a woman who had had her face bitten away, and, planting its forepaws upon the body, began to lick the congealed blood with its spiny tongue. At the same moment another of them approached a Christian who was holding in his arms an infant wrapped in the skin of a fawn. The infant, sobbing and crying, clung convulsively to its father, who, wishing to preserve its life, if only for an instant, forced himself to untwine its arms from his neck, in order that he might pass the little one to his companions behind. But the child's cries and struggles had irritated the lion. It uttered a short, sharp roar, crushed the child to death with a blow of its paw, and, seizing the head of the father in its gigantic jaws, proceeded to gnaw it to pieces.

Upon that the lions in general rushed upon the knots of Christians. Some of the women could not refrain from uttering cries of terror, though these were soon drowned by the roar of applause, and the roar of applause, in its turn, by the sound of the spectators rising to get a better view. And in truth there were terrible things to be seen—heads completely disappearing within gaping jaws, breasts torn open with a single bite, and hearts and lungs exposed. Everywhere, too, there was to be heard the sound of bones

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being crunched by massive fangs. Some of the lions, seizing their victims by the sides or the back, went leaping madly around the arena, as though seeking a quiet spot in which to devour their prey; while others fought with one another—rearing on their hind legs, struggling like wrestlers, and filling the amphitheatre with thunder. Rising, the spectators left their seats, and gravitated towards the lower tiers, in order to get the best possible view; with the result that many of them were crushed to death, and for a time it looked as though the furious mob would overflow into the arena, and rend the Christians in company with the lions. At one moment there could be heard cries scarcely human, at another applause, at another roars, snarls, the cracking of bones, and the whining of dogs. Then again the only sound to be heard was the sound of groaning.

Cæsar, holding his emerald to his eye, regarded the scene attentively, but the face of Petronius expressed only disgust and contempt. As for Chilo, he had long since been carried out of the amphitheatre. Again and again the dungeons vomited up new victims for slaughter. From above, from the topmost tier of the building, the Apostle Peter looked down upon them. No one saw him, for every head was turned towards the arena. At length he rose to his feet; and just as once before, in Cornelius' vineyard, he had blessed to death and to eternity those who were about to be imprisoned, so now he blessed with the sign of the cross those who were enduring agony in the jaws of wild beasts. He blessed their blood and their sufferings; he blessed the corpses which had become changed into shapeless heaps, and the souls which had fled from the blood-stained arena. And as he did so certain persons raised to him their eyes; and as they did so their faces became radiant—they smiled on seeing, high over their heads, the sign of the cross. But Peter's heart was breaking.

"O Lord," he prayed, "may Thy will be done! It is for Thy glory, and as a testimony to the Truth, that my sheep are perishing. Thou didst say unto me, 'Feed My sheep,' and behold, Lord, I do commit them unto Thee again. Take them unto Thyself, make them Thine own, heal their wounds, abate their sufferings, and grant them on high an even greater measure of happiness than the pain which they have endured on earth!"

Suddenly Cæsar seemed to be seized with a fit of frenzy or with a desire to outshine anything that had ever been seen in Rome before. At all events he whispered a few words in the ear of the Prefect, who thereupon left the balcony, and hastened to the prisoners' dungeons. Even

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the mob was stupefied when it saw the gratings once more open, and beasts of the most various kinds possible released—tigers from the Euphrates, panthers from Numidia, bears, wolves, hyænas, and jackals. In fact, the whole arena became a moving mass of striped and spotted, yellow, brown, and fawn-coloured bodies, which formed a vast and frightful whirlpool of animal life. The spectacle was unreal. The thing had been overdone. Amid the roars, howls, and snarls of the beasts there could be heard the strident, hysterical laughter of frightened women (among the audience) whose nerves had at last given way. Every one was growing alarmed. Faces were beginning to darken, and numerous voices to cry out, "Enough, enough!"

Yet it had been easier to let loose the beasts than it now proved easy to expel them from the arena. However, Cæsar had devised a means for clearing the scene which would at the same time provide a new amusement for the people. In every passage-way, between the tiers of seats, there now appeared, bow in hand, bands of Numidian negroes, with plumes in their hair and ear-rings in their ears. At once the mob divined what was to follow, and greeted them with shouts of approbation. The Numidians approached the barriers, and, fitting arrows to their stretched bow-strings, began to let fly among the swarm of beasts. Truly it was an unprecedented spectacle, this of these ebony warriors, with their supple forms bent backwards as they loosed a hail of darts from their ceaselessly-twanging bows. With the whizzing of the strings and the whistling of the feathered bolts were mingled howls of the beasts and cries of admiration from the spectators. Wolves, panthers, bears, and the few human beings who had remained alive in the arena fell side by side with one another. Here and there a lion, on feeling the bite of an arrow in his flank, would turn round his foam-flecked jaws to seize and gnaw the shaft of the missile. From every side came yelps of agony. As for the lesser beasts, they started to run blindly round the arena, in an access of panic, or else to charge the barriers with their muzzles. Without a moment's cessation, however, the arrows increased in number, until everything in the arena which had been alive was stretched in the final throes of death.

Then into the arena there rushed hundreds of slaves, armed with spades, shovels, brooms, handcarts, baskets for collecting and carrying away entrails, and sacks full of sand. Soon the entire expanse was swarming with busy workers, and in a twinkling the corpses had been removed, the blood and excrement dug in, or raked away, or covered with sand, and the arena sprinkled with a new and thick

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layer of the same material. That done, there entered Cupids, who sprinkled everywhere petals of roses and lilies. Lastly, the perfume-braziers were lighted afresh, and the folds of the velarium drawn back, since the sun had now sunk low in the heavens.

Upon this the crowd gazed at one another in astonishment—asking themselves what new spectacle was awaiting them that day. In truth there was awaiting them a spectacle for which no one had come prepared. Cæsar, who, a little while ago, had left the Imperial balcony, now suddenly reappeared in the flower-strewn arena—clothed in purple and crowned with gold. Behind him walked twelve choristers, furnished with lutes. With a silver lute in his hand, Nero advanced solemnly to the centre of the great space, bowed several times to the audience, and cast his eyes heavenwards. For a moment he stood thus, as though awaiting inspiration, and then, striking the strings of the lute, began:

“ O son of Latona,¹ O radiant god,
Who of Tenedos, Chrysos, and Chios art king,
Art thou he who, though having in his care
The city, thrice sacred, of Ilion,
Didst yield it to th’ assault of the Argive hosts,
And suffer the holy sanctuaries
Which blazed in thy honour without cease
To be stained with the blood of Trojan men?
Greybeards raised their hands to thee,
O thou of the puissant silver bow.
Mothers from secret, stricken breasts
Besought thine ear with cries of pain
As they prayed thee to ’fend their children’s lives.
Yet, though those cries might have rent a stone,
To the suffering of this thy people’s heart
Thou didst prove, O Smintheus, more hard than stone ”

Then the song passed gradually into an elegy—into a dirge that was plaintive and full of pain. Complete silence reigned in the amphitheatre. After a while Cæsar, himself affected, sang on:

“ With the dulcet sound of thy heavenly lyre
Thou yet canst drown the wails of grief;
E’en though the sadness of thy song
Doth fill the eye, like a flower, with dew.
But who shall blot out the day of woe,
Of fire and ruin, of ashes and dust?
O Smintheus, when all things were failing us,
Where, thou radiant god, wert thou? ”

Here Cæsar’s voice quivered, and his eyes grew moist, while the Vestal Virgins also were seen to be weeping. For a moment the people remained silent. Then there burst

¹ The god Apollo.

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forth a long, continuous storm of applause. Through it, at intervals, came the sound of creaking vehicles as the blood-stained remains of Christian men, women, and children were conveyed from the vomitoria to the pits of interment, known as puticuli.

Meanwhile the Apostle Peter, his aged, tremulous head buried in his hands, was crying aloud in spirit:

"O Lord, O Lord, to whom, then, hast Thou given the dominion of the world? When wilt Thou establish in this city Thy capital?"

XVI

THE sun had set in the west, and left behind it only the glow of evening, when the spectacle in the amphitheatre came to an end. The crowd poured out of the entrance-ways into the city streets. The Augustans alone delayed their departure until this human flood should have, to a certain extent, cleared away. Then in a group they left their seats, and gathered around the Imperial balcony, to which Cæsar had returned for the purpose of receiving the customary meed of praise. Nevertheless, although the audience had not been sparing of its applause, Nero was in a dissatisfied mood, since he had hoped for an enthusiasm absolutely unprecedented—for a furore akin to madness. In vain did the Augustans loudly belaud him, in vain did the Vestal Virgins kiss his divine hands, in vain did Rubria droop her golden head until it almost touched his breast. No, he was not satisfied. In particular did the silence preserved by Petronius annoy him. A single word—that is to say, a single *eulogistic* word, a word that might have thrown into relief the merits of the hymn—would, at that moment, have done Nero a world of good. At length, unable to contain himself, he signed to Petronius to ascend the dais.

"Why do you not speak?" he inquired.

"Because I cannot find words to do so," replied Petronius coldly. "You have surpassed yourself."

"That is my opinion also; yet this mob—"

"How can you expect such a mongrel rabble to be a judge of poetry?"

"Then you too noticed that I did not receive the applause which I ought to have done?"

"The moment was not well chosen."

"And wherefore?"

"For the reason that when one is suffocated with the odour of blood one cannot make the best use of one's ears."

Nero clenched his fists, and exclaimed:

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"Oh, those Christians! They have burnt Rome, and wish also to attack myself! What further tortures can I invent for them?"

Petronius perceived that he had adopted the wrong line; so, leaning forward, he murmured:

"Your hymn is miraculously beautiful. Yet permit me to make one observation. In the fourth line of the third strophe the rhythm halts a little."

Nero, as though detected in a crime of the utmost infamy, turned purple with shame, threw a look of terror around him, and replied in a whisper:

"You—you notice everything! Yes, I know what you mean, and I *will* change the line. But do you think that any one else has noticed it? Are you *sure* that no one else has done so? In any case I adjure you by all the gods not to mention it to a soul—no, not if you value your life!"

Petronius frowned, and said, as though giving free rein to his weariness and lack of interest:

"Divine one, if I displease you, you are at liberty to condemn me to death; but do not, I pray you, keep threatening me with death, since for such threats I care nothing." And he looked Nero full in the face.

"Do not trouble yourself," at length said Cæsar. "You know that I love you."

"That is a bad sign," was Petronius' inward comment.

"Also," continued Cæsar. "I should have liked to have invited you to a banquet to-day, but would rather shut myself up, and recast that cursed line in the verses. If I did not do so, others than yourself might notice the fault—Seneca, perhaps, or Secundus Carinas, although I hope soon to be rid of both of them."

With that he summoned Seneca to his side, and informed him that he was about to send him, together with Acratus and Secundus Carinas, to tour the provinces and elsewhere, with the aim of collecting money from the various towns, villages, and more famous temples. Seneca, however, understanding that this would be a mission of wholesale robbery, sacrilege, and outrage, returned a blank refusal.

"Nay, my lord," he said. "I must go into the country to await death, for I am old, and my nerves are ailing."

Yet it was not so much his Iberian nerves that were at fault (since they had a greater resisting power than Chilo's), but his general health, which had worn him to a shadow, and turned his head completely white.

Nero glanced at him, and reflected that in any case he would not be troubled with him much longer.

"Very well," he said. "Of course I do not wish to expose you to the risks of a journey when you are ill. Rather, in

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view of the affection which I feel for you, I wish to have you always by my side. That being so, you will shut yourself up in your house, and not leave it again."

Then he burst out laughing as he added:

"If I were to send Acratus and Carinas alone, it would be as though I sent a couple of wolves to get me some sheep. Whom can I set in authority over them?"

"Myself, my lord," said Domitius Afer.

"No," retorted Cæsar. "I do not mean to draw upon Rome the wrath of Mercury—which would certainly be the result of your vexing him with your knavery. I want, rather, a Stoic of some kind, like Seneca, or like my new friend, the philosopher Chilo."

With this he turned round, and inquired:

"What has become of that Chilo?"

The latter, having recovered himself under the influence of the fresh air, had returned to the amphitheatre in time to hear the hymn to Apollo. He now approached Cæsar, and said:

"Behold, I am here, O radiant offspring of the sun and of the moon. Though ill, I have been restored to health by your singing."

"Then I will send *you* to the Achæans," said Cæsar. "Probably you know, to a sesterlius, what the resources of their every temple are?"

"You may do as you suggest, O Zeus," replied Chilo; "and you will find that the gods will render you such a monetary tribute as they have never yet rendered to a mortal man."

"Very good. Yet I should be loath to deprive you of the sight of the games."

"O Baal," began Chilo; but the rest of his sentence was drowned in the laughter of the Augustans, who were delighted to see the Imperial good humour restored.

"No, my lord," said they. "Do not deny this fearless Greek the sight of the games."

"My lord," retorted Chilo, "at least deny me the sight of these rascals, of these geese of the Capitol, whose brains put together would scarce fill an acorn-cup. O first-born of Phœbus, I feel disposed to compose a Greek hymn in your honour; and for that purpose would I fain spend a few days in the temple of the Muses, in order that I may implore their inspiration."

"No, no!" cried Cæsar. "That is a mere subterfuge to escape the rest of the games. No, no, Chilo!"

"My lord, I swear to you that I would fain write a hymn."

"Then you shall write it by night, and seek inspiration, rather, of Diana, who is Phœbus' sister."

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Chilo bowed, but at the same time cast a look of fury at the laughing Augustans. The Emperor now turned to Senecio and Sullius Nerulinus, and said:

"Do you reckon that, of the Christians set aside for to-day's spectacle, even one half have yet been dealt with?"

Old Aquilus Regulus, who was an expert in matters of the Circus, reflected a moment and replied:

"Spectacles in which there figure unarmed and unskilled actors last a long time, and are less interesting than are the other sort."

"Then," said Cæsar, "in future I will provide these people with weapons."

Upon this the superstitious Vestinus suddenly awoke from a reverie, and asked with an air of mystery:

"Have you noticed that, when at the point of death, these Christians seem to have a vision? They look up to the skies, and, apparently, die without pain. I feel sure that they can see something as they do so."

As he spoke he raised his own eyes to the opening above the amphitheatre—to the opening over which night had begun to throw its own velarium of countless stars. His companions, however, answered with laughter, and with ribald suggestions as to what the nature of the Christians' vision might be. Presently Cæsar signed to the slaves who were holding the torches, and left the Circus, followed by Vestal Virgins, Senators, Augustans, and officials at large.

The night was clear and mild. Outside the Circus a crowd had lingered to see Cæsar depart, but its aspect was silent and moody, and the scanty applause which it raised soon died away. From the spoliarium there was still issuing an endless train of carts, laden with the blood-stained remnants of Christians.

Petronius and Vinicius made the journey home in silence. Only when they were approaching the villa did Petronius at length inquire:

"Have you thought over what I said to you?"

"Yes," replied Vinicius.

"Do you understand that for me also it is now a matter of life and death to rescue Lygia, despite Cæsar and Tigellinus? I think that in the struggle I shall come out the victor—that in the game I shall win, even though it be at the cost of my life. To-day's work has confirmed me in my purpose."

"May Christ prosper you!"

"Well, you shall see."

While they were talking the litter came to a halt at the villa, and they descended. As they did so a dark figure approached them.

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"Is that the noble Vinicius?" it asked.

"Yes," replied the tribune. "What do you want?"

"I am Nazarus, the son of Miriam. I come from the prison with news of Lygia."

Vinicius leant heavily forward upon the youth's arm, and stared at him in the light of the torches without being able to utter a single word. Nevertheless Nazarus divined the question which was fluttering on the tribune's lips.

"Yes, she is alive," he said. "Ursus has sent me to tell you that often in her delirium she mentions your name in her prayers to God."

"Glory be to Christ!" exclaimed Vinicius. "He alone can restore her to me."

Then he led Nazarus into the library, where presently they were joined by Petronius.

"The illness saved her from outrage," continued Nazarus; "for it made the villains afraid of catching the infection. Also, Ursus and Glaucus the physician watch over her day and night."

"And are the gaolers the same as before?"

"Yes, my lord; and she still occupies their room. As for the brethren who were in the underground dungeons, they are all dead of fever or suffocation."

"Who are you?" put in Petronius at this point.

"One whom the noble Vinicius well knows," replied the youth. "I am the son of a widow with whom Lygia used to lodge."

"And you are a Christian?"

The youth glanced shyly in Vinicius' direction, but, perceiving that he was engaged in prayer, raised his head, and replied:

"Yes."

"Then how did you contrive to gain entry to the prison?"

"By having myself engaged to remove the corpses. I did so in the hope of assisting my brethren, and of procuring some news concerning them."

Petronius looked keenly at the youth's handsome face, blue eyes, and thick, dark hair. Then he asked:

"From what country come you, my friend?"

"I am a Galilean, my lord."

"Would you like to see Lygia again free?"

"Yes, even if it were to cost me my life!"

"Then," put in Vinicius, "tell the gaolers to lay her in a coffin as though she were dead, and do you yourself find some men to help you to carry her away by night. Near the Burial Pits you will find other men waiting with a litter, to whom you will deliver the coffin. Finally, you

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will promise to each gaoler, on my behalf, as much gold as he can carry away in his pockets."

While speaking thus, Vinicius had quite lost the expression of torpor which, of late, had become habitual with him. In him there had revived the soldier, and hope was restoring his former energy once more.

Nazarus raised his hands, crying:

"May Christ restore her to health, for freed she shall be!"

"Will the gaolers prove complacent?" asked Petronius.

"Yes," was Vinicius' reply. "Already they have consented to let her escape; and the fact that she is to be taken away as a corpse will make their task the easier."

"True, there is a man whose duty it is to test the bodies with a hot iron, to ascertain if they are really dead," said Nazarus; "but a few sesterii will suffice to induce him not to touch the face with his iron, while a piece of gold will cause him to touch only the winding-sheet, not the body."

"Tell him," said Vinicius, "that he shall have a purse full of such pieces. But do you think you can obtain reliable men for the rest of the scheme?"

"Yes. I can obtain men ready even to sell their wives and children. Once corrupted, the gaolers will allow any one we like to enter."

"In that case you could include myself among your men?" said Vinicius.

But Petronius opposed this, on the ground that Vinicius might be recognised by the Prætorians; which mishap would ruin all.

"You must not approach either the prison or the Burial Pits," he said. "Every one—including, most of all, Cæsar and Tigellinus—must be led to think that she is dead. Otherwise they will at once revive the hue and cry for her. The only way in which we can avert suspicion is to have her removed to the Alban Hills while we ourselves remain in Rome. In a week or two, however, you will fall ill, and send for Nero's physician, who will order you also to the Hills. There you will rejoin her, and then—"

Here Petronius reflected for a moment; after which, with an evasive gesture, he concluded:

"Well, *then*, perhaps, the times will have changed."

"May Christ have pity upon her!" exclaimed Vinicius. "She is ill, and may die during the removal."

"In the first instance we will hide her somewhere close at hand; and, afterwards, the fresh air will cure her. Have you not in the Alban Hills some tenant-farmer whom you could trust?"

"Yes, I *have* such a one," replied Vinicius. "Near

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Coriola, in the Hills, I know of a man who carried me in his arms when I was a child, and who is devoted to me."

Petronius tendered him a set of tablets.

"Write to this man," he said, "and tell him to come hither to-morrow. I will send a courier with the letter."

Within a few minutes a courier was galloping for Coriola.

Before departing, Nazarus took Vinicius aside, and said to him under his breath:

"My lord, I intend to tell no one of our plans—not even my mother; but the Apostle Peter is to come to us after leaving the amphitheatre, and I should like to confide to him all that we are intending."

"You can speak aloud in safety," replied Vinicius. "The Apostle was seated among Petronius' servants at the amphitheatre. For the rest, I myself will come with you."

He called for a cloak, and they set out.

Petronius, left behind, drew a deep breath.

"Ah, Ahenobarbus!" he said to himself. "You wish to feast your eyes upon a lover's agony, do you? And you, Augusta, you began by being jealous of this girl's beauty, and now you have a mind to eat her raw because your Rufius is dead? And you, Tigellinus, you wish to destroy her in order to do me a bad turn?—Ah well, I may inform you, and, indeed, every one else, that she is *not* going to appear in the arena. I am going to snatch her out of your hands so neatly that all your plans will end in smoke. And, later on, I shall say to you, each time that you happen to greet my eyes: 'Good day to you, O set of fools whom Petronius has fooled!'"

Entirely satisfied with himself, he passed into the triclinium, and sat down to supper with Eunice. During the meal the lector, or reader, recited to them the Idylls of Theocrites. Outside, the wind was bringing clouds from the heights of Soractum, and gathering them into a storm which was to trouble that summer night. At intervals the rolling of thunder could be heard among the seven hills. Within, Petronius and Eunice reclined side by side as they listened to the loves of shepherds, told in the musical dialect of the Dorians. At length, calmed in spirit, they rose, and prepared themselves for a night's rest. Presently a slave announced that Vinicius had returned, and Petronius hastened to meet him.

"Well?" he said. "Has any new development occurred? Has Nazarus gone to the prison?"

"Yes," replied Vinicius, passing his hand over his damp hair. "He has gone thither to confer with the gaolers, while I myself have seen Peter, who has recommended me to pray, and to believe that all will yet turn out well."

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"Good! If our scheme turns out as we are hoping, we shall be able to remove her to-morrow night."

"Yes. The farmer, with his men, will be here at day-break."

"Then go you and take some rest."

Nevertheless Vinicius, on reaching his cubiculum, knelt down, and engaged in prayer.

At dawn Niger, the farmer, arrived from Coriola. For precaution's sake he had left his four slaves—trusty men from Britain—in a tavern in the Suburra, together with mules and a litter.

At the sight of his young master the farmer was greatly moved, and said as he kissed his hands and eyes:

"Are you not well, dear master? Or is it that grief has removed the colour from your face? At first sight I could scarcely recognise you."

Leading the man aside into the inner colonnade, Vinicius there confided to him his secret.

"So she is a Christian!" cried Niger with a keen glance at Vinicius.

"Yes," replied the tribune. "And I myself am a Christian."

Glittering tears of joy sprang to Niger's eyes.

"I thank Thee, O Christ!" he exclaimed. "I thank Thee for having caused the scales to fall from the eyes which, beyond all others in the world, I love!"

Presently Petronius entered, bringing Nazarus with him.

"I have good news for you!" he cried to Vinicius from a distance. And, true enough, the news was good. In the first place, the physician Glaucus had given his word that Lygia would live, although the gaol fever from which she was suffering was the disease of which hundreds of other prisoners were dying, both in the tullianum and elsewhere; while, in the second place, both the gaolers and the tester of corpses had been bought over, as well as an assistant named Attys.

"Also, we have pierced some holes in the coffin," said Nazarus. "The only danger is lest she should utter a groan or make some exclamation as we are passing through the ranks of the Prætorians. However, Glaucus is going to administer to her a narcotic. The lid of the coffin will not be nailed down, so that it will be easy for you to lift it and transfer Lygia to your litter while we replace her, in the coffin, with a sack of sand."

"Are any other bodies to be removed from the prison?" asked Petronius.

"Yes," replied Nazarus. "A score or so of people have died during the night; and by this evening more will have

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passed away. Though we shall be forced to follow in the train of their coffins, we intend so to linger as to get left behind. That is to say, as soon as ever we reach the street corner my companion will begin to walk lame to such an extent that we shall soon be outdistanced. Meanwhile you will be awaiting us near the small temple of Libitina. May God send that the night be dark!"

"God will guide us," said Niger. "Last night was clear, yet suddenly a storm broke; and though the sky to-night is equally cloudless, the air is stifling. In fact, every night at present is likely to be rainy and dark."

"And you will be marching without torches, I presume?" put in Vinicius.

"Only those who march at the head of these processions carry torches. In any case, station yourselves near the temple of Libitina as soon as ever it grows dark, although ordinarily we do not remove the corpses until shortly before midnight."

For a moment nothing more was said, and only the hurried breathing of Vinicius broke the silence.

At length Petronius turned to him, and said:

"Yesterday I was of opinion that it would be best for both of us to remain at home; but now I see that that would be impossible."

"Yes, yes!" replied Vinicius. "I at least must be there. No one but myself must take her from the coffin."

"And once she has reached my house at Coriola, I will continue to be answerable for her," added Niger.

Here the conversation came to an end. Niger returned to his men at the tavern, and Nazarus to the prison, with a bag of gold under his tunic. For Vinicius there began a day of feverish waiting.

"The affair is bound to prove successful," Petronius told him. "It could not have been better conceived. True, for a while you will have to feign mourning, and to go about in a black cloak; but that need not entail your absenting yourself from the Circus. No; let yourself be seen there. Everything has turned out so well that a miscarriage is impossible. Meanwhile, are you perfectly sure of your farmer?"

"He is a Christian," was Vinicius' reply.

Petronius looked at him in astonishment—then shrugged his shoulders, and said, as though speaking to himself:

"By Pollux, how the sect grows in spite of everything! And what a root it takes in men's minds! If a similar reign of terror were to threaten other folk, they would at once renounce their gods—Roman, Greek, and Egyptian alike. It is wonderful! By Pollux, but if I thought that anything

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in the world could still lie at the disposal of our deities I would promise each one of them six white bulls, and a dozen to Jupiter Capitolinus! However, do you be equally unsparing of promises with that Christ of yours."

"I have not only promised, but have given, Him my soul," replied Vinicius.

With this Petronius re-entered his cubiculum, while Vinicius repaired to the slope of the Vatican Hill, to the quarryman's hut in which he had received baptism at the hands of the Apostle. Somehow he had a fancy that Christ would be more ready to listen to his prayers in this cabin than anywhere else. Throwing himself upon the floor of the hut, he surrendered his aching soul to supplication, and in the effort became so entirely absorbed as to forget where he was, and to take no notice of what was passing around him. Only when afternoon was come was he aroused by the trumpets of Nero's Circus; whereupon he rose to his feet, and left the hut. The heat was intense, and the silence, though periodically broken by the sound of the brazen instruments, had running through it also the restful bourdon of grasshoppers. Above the city the sky was still blue; but low on the horizon, in the direction of the Sabine Hills, dark clouds were beginning to mass themselves.

On arriving home, Vinicius found Petronius awaiting him in the atrium.

"I have just been to the Palatine," said the elder man. "I had a purpose in showing myself there, and even took part in a game of dice. To-night Anicius is to give a banquet, and I let it be known that, though we shall be present thereat, we shall not arrive until after midnight, owing to the fact that I must first take some sleep. True enough, I *shall* attend the festival, and should advise you to do the same."

"Is there no news of Niger or of Nazarus?" asked Vinicius.

"No. We shall not see them till midnight. To-morrow there is to be an exhibition of crucified Christians, but perhaps the rain will put a stop to the spectacle."

Here he touched Vinicius' arm.

"You shall see her," he added, "not on the cross, but at Coriola. By Castor, but from the moment when we rescue her I would not again surrender her for all the jewels in Rome!"

At nightfall there fell a heavy shower, which steamed on the sun-baked pavements and filled the streets with mist; and it was followed alternately by intervals of fair weather and further spurts of rain.

"Let us make haste," at length said Vinicius. "It

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is possible that the storm may lead them to remove the bodies earlier."

"Yes; it is time we were moving," assented Petronius.

Donning Gallic cloaks with hoods, while Petronius also armed himself with a poniard, they left the villa by the garden gate. The storm had emptied the streets, and from time to time a flash of lightning would throw into crude relief houses newly built or houses still in course of construction. At length they saw before them the mound on which stood the diminutive temple of the goddess Libitina, with, at its foot, a group of mules and horses.

"Niger!" called Vinicius in a low voice.

"I am here, my lord," replied an answering voice from the mist of rain.

"Is everything ready?"

"Yes, beloved master. But do you take shelter under the mound, or the rain will soak you to the skin. What a storm it is! I think that hail will follow."

True enough, hailstones had begun to fall, and the temperature of the air was rapidly falling. The men conversed in muffled tones.

"Even should we be seen," said Niger, "no one will suspect us, for we shall be taken for persons sheltering from the storm. Yet I am afraid that the removal of corpses may be put off until to-morrow."

"No, the hail will not continue long," said Petronius. "Besides, we can remain here till daybreak if necessary."

So they waited with strained ears. Presently the hail ceased, but was followed by a smart shower of rain. Now and then the wind rose, and brought with it the fearful stench of corpses decaying in the Burial Pits, where they lay covered only with a sprinkling of earth.

Suddenly Niger exclaimed:

"I can see a light through the mist! Yes, and another, and another! They must be torches."

Then, turning to his men, he added:

"Give a look to your mules, and stand ready."

"Yes, they are coming," said Petronius.

The lights grew gradually more distinct, until it became possible to distinguish the flames of torches flickering in the wind. Niger made the sign of the cross, and breathed a prayer.

The mournful cortège halted when it drew level with the temple. Petronius, Vinicius, and the farmer pressed themselves into the shadow of the mound, but the bearers had halted but to swathe their mouths and faces in linen, as a precaution against the stench which, in the immediate neighbourhood of the Pits, was abominable. Soon they

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again lifted the stretchers, and resumed their way. One coffin alone remained stationary before the little temple.

Vinicius darted forward, followed by Petronius, Niger, and the four British slaves with the litter. Alas! Nazarus' sad voice greeted them from the darkness with the words:

"My lord, she and Ursus have been transferred to the Esquiline prison, and it is another body that we are carrying. She was taken away from the Mamertine before midnight."

As they re-entered the villa Petronius' face looked dark as night, and he made no attempt to console Vinicius, since he knew that to effect a rescue from the Esquiline dungeons was an impossibility. The reason for the transfer, he divined, was that Lygia might not die of the fever, but be reserved for her fate. From the bottom of his heart he felt sorry for her and for Vinicius. Also, he reflected that this was the first time that ever in his life he had failed in an enterprise which he had undertaken.

"Fortuna has deserted me!" he said to himself. Then he glanced at Vinicius, who was gazing at him with dilated pupils.

"What is the matter with you?" asked the elder man. "Have you caught the fever?"

Vinicius replied in a strange voice:

"I still believe that *He* can restore her to me."

Over the city the storm was beginning to die away.

XVII

A THREE days' rain—an exceptional phenomenon in Rome during the summer time—added to storms of hail which, contrary to the natural order of things, beat upon the city by night as well as by day, interrupted the progress of the games. The people grew alarmed, and took to predicting a sorry vintage harvest; until finally, when a thunderbolt had reduced the statue of Ceres to a mere ingot of bronze, sacrifices were ordered to be offered in the temple of Jupiter Capitolinus. In response the priests of Ceres had it put about that the wrath of the gods had fallen upon the city in revenge for the tardiness displayed in the punishing of the Christians; whereupon the populace demanded, and obtained, an edict that, regardless of the elements, the games should resume their course. Simultaneously fine weather returned, and the Circus speedily filled with thousands of spectators. Cæsar also arrived early, accompanied by the Vestals and his Court.

The spectacle was to begin with a fight between Christians

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and Christians; to which end the latter had been clothed as gladiators, and furnished with weapons both of offence and of defence, like professional combatants. But a miscalculation had been made. The Christians threw down upon the sand their nets, tridents, spears, and swords, and rushed into one another's arms with mutual exhortations to accept their fate resignedly. Upon this the spectators became seized with a resentment and fury that knew no bounds. Some rated the Christians as cowards, while others declared that they had maliciously declined to fight out of sheer hatred for the people, and in order that the latter might be cheated of the pleasure which a display of courage always gave. Finally Cæsar issued orders for genuine gladiators to be loosed upon the victims, who in a twinkling were massacred where they knelt in the arena.

As soon as the bodies had been cleared away there followed a series of mythological tableaux invented by Cæsar himself, including a spectacle of Hercules dying on Mount Ceta amid a circle of genuine flame. At the thought that perhaps the rôle of Hercules had been assigned to Ursus Vinicius shuddered; but the turn of Lygia's faithful servitor had not yet come—it being another Christian who was consumed at the stake. Next, Chilo, who had failed to obtain Cæsar's absolution from the duty of being present at the games, had the pleasure of beholding a tableau in which there figured persons whom he himself had known. The tableau represented the deaths of Dædalus and Icarus—the part of the former being allotted to the aged Euricius who had once shown Chilo the sign of the fish, and the part of Icarus to Euricius' son, Quartus. By means of special machinery both were hoisted to an immense height, and then let fall. Quartus alighted so near to the Imperial balcony that his blood bespattered the carving with which its exterior was adorned, and even the border of the purple awning. The actual fall Chilo did not see, for he had closed his eyes; but as soon as he heard the dull thud made by the body, and perceived blood to be at his very side, he came very near to fainting. Tableau succeeded tableau. In particular did the infamous tortures of virgins who were outraged by gladiators clad in the skins of wild beasts delight the mob. In this exhibition Christian maidens figured as priestesses of Cybele and Ceres, as the daughters of Danais, and as Dirce and Pasiphaë. Finally, a number of girls of tender age were torn asunder by wild horses. These new inventions of Cæsar's met with loud applause from the populace; and, proud of such recognition, and glorying in his work, he never once removed the emerald monocle from his eye.

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Next there came tableaux derived from the annals of Rome. First of all a sickening odour of roast flesh filled the amphitheatre. This was Mucius Scævola with his hand in the brazier. The Christian victim who played the part uttered not a groan, but stood with his eyes turned heavenwards and his blackening lips murmuring a prayer. As soon as he had received the *coup-de-grâce*, and his dead body had been removed to the spoliarium, the usual midday interval was announced.

Accompanied by the Vestals and the Augustans, Cæsar left the amphitheatre, and repaired to an immense scarlet pavilion in which there had been prepared for him and his guests an abundant repast. The majority of the audience followed Cæsar's example, and flocked outside to stretch their cramped limbs and attack the viands which, by Cæsar's orders, slaves offered to all and sundry. Around the Imperial pavilion picturesque groups soon formed, but others of the spectators descended into the arena, on quitting their seats, and, fingering the blood-clotted sand, fell to discoursing knowingly on the preceding spectacle, and on those which were to come. In time, however, these knowing ones gravitated, like their fellows, to the banquet, and there remained in the arena only a few who were held there, not by curiosity, but by compassion for the coming victims—although this fact they concealed when they returned to the corridors.

Next, the arena was raked over, and a number of holes dug in the sand—the outermost line of these holes extending to within a few paces of the Imperial balcony. From without came the cries and clatter and applause of the populace, while within the building men worked feverishly to set the stage for a new spectacle of torture. Suddenly the gates of the cuniculi, or dungeons, opened, and from every outlet there streamed into the arena swarms of Christians entirely naked, and carrying crosses on their shoulders.

Every inch of the sand now became crowded. Old men and women advanced at a run—their backs bending beneath the weight of their wooden burdens; while beside them came men in the prime of life, women with flowing hair with which they strove to veil their nakedness, youths, and even young children. For the most part, victims and crosses were alike garlanded with flowers; while with blows and lashes the attendants of the arena forced the condemned to fit their crosses into the holes which had been dug, and to hold them in position there. The persons thus brought forth to die were those whom it had not been possible to throw to the lions and other ferocious beasts.

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Presently black slaves seized the victims, and laid them upon the crosses; after which, with all possible speed, they nailed the victims' hands to the cross-pieces, since it was necessary that everything should be in readiness by the time the spectators had regained their seats. Consequently the amphitheatre resounded with the blows of hammers; and these, re-echoing from the furthestmost lines of crosses, penetrated even to the tent where Cæsar was entertaining the Vestals and his friends. In that tent wine was being drunk, raillery directed at Chilo, and doubtful badinage whispered in the ears of the Vestals. In the arena nails were being driven into the hands and feet of Christians, shovels were rattling, and earth was being heaped into the cavities into which the crosses had been fitted.

Among the victims was Crispus, whom the lions had not had time to rend. Always prepared for death, he was rejoicing to think that his hour had come. Except for his loins, which were girt about with a garland of ivy, as well as for his head, which was crowned with roses, his emaciated body was stark naked. Yet his eyes never ceased to flash with inextinguishable energy, nor his face to evince implacable fanaticism. Nor had his heart changed. Just as, in the dungeon, he had threatened his brethren (sewn in the skins of wild beasts) with the divine wrath, so now, instead of consoling his companions, he thundered out the words:

"Thank you the Saviour, in that He is permitting you to die the death which He Himself died! Peradventure, for that death, a portion of your sins will be forgiven you! Yet tremble you before Him, inasmuch as justice will be done, and the unjust will be set apart from the just!"

Thus he spoke to the accompaniment of the clattering of hammers. Ever the arena was growing more and more studded with crosses. Turning to those of the victims who were still standing beside the instruments prepared for their torture, Crispus continued:

"I see the heavens opened, but I also see Hell gaping. Do I myself know how I am to account to the Saviour for my life?—yes, even though I have in me faith, and abhor evil? Yet it is not death that I fear, but resurrection—not punishment, but judgment. For the day of wrath is come."

Suddenly from one of the benches near the arena there arose a calm, solemn voice which said:

"Not the day of wrath, but the day of mercy, of salvation, and of joy. I say unto you that Christ will gather you unto Himself, and console you, and bid you sit down at His

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right hand. Have ye faith, for the heavens are indeed opening before you!"

At these words every eye turned in the direction of the voice. Even those who were already hanging on crosses raised their pale, tortured faces to gaze at the man who had thus spoken. He, approaching the barrier which bounded the arena, blessed those within it with the sign of the cross. For a moment Crispus flung out an arm at the speaker, as though to annihilate him with a look. Then, recognising him whom he threatened, he let the arm fall to his side as with bent knees and in a hushed voice he murmured:

"The Apostle Paul!"

Then, to the utter astonishment of the arena attendants, all who had not yet been nailed to their crosses knelt down. Paul turned to Crispus, and said:

"Do not threaten them, Crispus, for to-day they will be with you in Paradise. You think that they are about to be condemned: but who is going to condemn them? Will He condemn them who, for their redemption, gave His only Son? Will Christ condemn them who, for their redemption, died even as they, for His doctrine, are about to die? Will He condemn them who loves them? And who else shall bring an accusation against the Lord's elect?—who shall say of their blood, 'It is accursed'?"

"Nay, but I hate evil," said the old man.

"Over hatred of evil has Christ set the love of one's neighbour. For His religion is love, not hatred."

"I have sinned in the very hour of death!" exclaimed Crispus, striking his breast.

At this moment a soldier approached the Apostle, and asked of him:

"Who are you that are speaking to the condemned?"

"A Roman citizen," replied Paul calmly. Then, turning to Crispus again, he continued:

"Fear not, for to-day is the day of mercy. Die, therefore, in peace, O faithful servant of God."

Here two negroes approached Crispus to nail him to the cross.

"Pray for me, my brethren!" was his final cry. No longer did his face look stern: on his statuesque features there lingered only an expression of gentleness and peace. Voluntarily he assisted the executioners in their task by extending his arms along the cross-pieces; after which he looked up to heaven, and resigned himself to ardent prayer. Nothing did he seem to feel. Even when the nails pierced his hands he did not shrink, nor did a spasm of pain cross his countenance; and all the time that his feet were being

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nailed to the cross, and the cross being raised, and the earth being stamped down around its foot, he continued praying, ever praying. Only when the crowd began, with ribald shouts and laughter, to re-enter the building did the old man frown, as though indignant that the impious mob should trouble the peace, the calm, the sweetness of his death.

The Circus now seemed to have been planted with a forest in which there was suspended to each tree a human being. The cross-pieces of the trees and the heads of the crucified were gilded with sunlight, while the floor of the arena was studded with golden lozenges of the same, dancing amid a sea of dark shadows. The pleasure of the spectacle lay in watching the slow agony of the victims. So dense was the forest of crosses that the attendants could scarcely pass between the trees—the outer rings being garnished principally with women, and Crispus, as the most important victim, being placed almost exactly opposite the Imperial balcony, on a huge cross of which the base was festooned with hawthorn.

None of the martyrs had, as yet, expired, but some of those who had been the first to be suspended had fainted. Yet not a groan was there to be heard, not a single cry for pity. Some had their heads leaning upon one shoulder, or drooping upon their breast, as though they had been overcome with sleep; others seemed to be meditating; others, with their eyes turned heavenwards, were feebly moving their lips. In the presence of that awful forest of crosses, of those outstretched bodies, of that deathlike silence, the joyous clamour of the people suddenly hushed. Even the nudity of those stiffened, contracted female forms no longer excited the lust of the mob. No wagers were laid as to which victim would die before which, as had hitherto been the custom. Even Cæsar seemed weary of it all as indolently he twisted the necklace which encircled the huge neck beneath his gigantic head.

Suddenly Crispus opened his eyes, and caught sight of Nero. Instantly his face resumed an expression so implacable, his eyes began to blaze with such a terrible light, that the Augustans fell to whispering among themselves, and to point him out with their fingers. Finally Cæsar's own attention became attracted, and slowly he raised the monocle to his eye. Thus, in absolute silence, all sat staring at Crispus, who was vainly endeavouring to detach his right hand from the cross.

At length, with breast inflated and straining sides, he cried:

"Woe unto you, matricide!"

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This insult, offered to him in the very presence of his people, caused Cæsar to frown, and to let fall the emerald. Once more Crispus' voice, growing ever more and more menacing, resounded through the amphitheatre:

"Woe unto you, slayer of your mother and of your brother! Woe unto you, Anti-Christ! The abyss is opening beneath your feet, death is stretching out its arms to seize you, the tomb is yawning to receive your body! Woe unto you, O living corpse, for you shall die in fear and be damned for all eternity!"

His limbs horribly extended, so that he looked like a living skeleton, the old man shook his white beard over the Imperial balcony, and, in doing so, bestrewed the balcony with petals from the rose-garland with which he had been crowned.

"Woe unto you, murderer!" he exclaimed a third time. "For your hour is at hand!"

With that he made a last desperate effort to release his right hand from the cross, in order that he might shake it at Cæsar; and for a moment or two it seemed that he would succeed. Suddenly, however, his arms stretched themselves out, his body sank down, his head fell forward upon his breast, and his spirit passed away.

In that forest of crosses the weaker of the martyrs were now sleeping the eternal sleep.

XVIII

"My lord," said Chilo, "the sea is like olive-oil, and the waves seem to have sunk to rest. Let us set out for Hellas. In Hellas the glory of an Apollo awaits you. In Hellas crowns and triumphal progresses will be offered you. In Hellas men will greet you as a god, and the gods themselves accept you as their guest and their equal. On the other hand, *here*, my lord—!"

He said no more, for his lower lip had started so violently to tremble that his words died away into inarticulate sounds.

"Yes, we will set out as soon as ever the games are over," replied Nero. "But already there are people who are beginning to say that the Christians were innocent; and if I were to set out now, every one would soon be repeating that statement. But what is frightening you so much, you rotten old mushroom?"

Light though his tone was, the attention with which he scrutinised the Greek betrayed his anxiety. As a matter

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of fact he had been greatly alarmed by Crispus' words. Even after he had returned to the palace, rage, shame, and fear banished sleep from his eyes.

The superstitious Vestinus glanced around him, and said in a mysterious voice:

"Did you hear the old man, my lord? There is something strange about these Christians. In any case their deity seems to grant them an easy death. Is there not some risk of that deity avenging them?"

"I am not to blame," said Cæsar quickly. "Tigellinus it was who organised the games."

"Yes, it *was* I," assented Tigellinus: "nor do I care a fig for all the Christians in the world. Vestinus is a mere bag of superstition, while this lion-hearted Greek of yours would die at the sight of a hen ruffling her feathers to defend her young."

"Very good," said Nero; "but in future you will either have these Christians' tongues cut out or gags stuffed into their mouths."

"Yes, I will have them gagged with fire, my lord."

"Woe is me!" groaned Chilo.

Cæsar, however, reassured by Tigellinus' boast, burst out laughing, and said as he pointed to the old Greek:

"Behold the bearing of the descendant of Achilles!"

And, indeed, Chilo's appearance was most woe-begone. His few remaining hairs had turned completely white, and his face become stamped with an expression of ever-growing anxiety. There were even moments when his haggard bearing might have conveyed the impression that he had lost his senses. Occasionally he would fail to answer questions put to him, while at other times he would be seized with fits of fury, and grow so scurrilous in his replies that the Augustans would change their minds about angering him further.

One of these fits had just seized him.

"You can do what you like with me," he cried, "but to the games I will *not* go!" And he snapped his fingers defiantly.

Nero looked at him for a moment; then said as he turned to Tigellinus:

"See to it that in the Gardens Chilo walks by my side. I desire to observe how our torches will impress him."

The menace in Cæsar's tone made Chilo tremble.

"My lord," he said, "even if I go with you, I shall see nothing. My sight is always bad at night time."

"Oh, it will be light enough on *that* occasion," replied Cæsar with an ominous smile, "—as light as day itself."

Then he turned to the Augustans, and fell to discussing

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with them the chariot races which were to conclude the games.

Petronius approached Chilo, and said as he touched his arm:

"I was right when I told you that you would never play the part to the end."

To which the other replied:

"To do so I shall need to get drunk."

With that he stretched a trembling hand towards a jar of wine, but lacked the strength to lift it to his lips. Vestinus took from him the vessel, and, leaning over him with a countenance full at once of curiosity and of alarm, inquired:

"Are the Furies pursuing you?"

The old man looked at the speaker with mouth open, as though he had failed to understand the question. Then he fell to blinking his eyes.

Vestinus repeated the question.

"No," replied Chilo; "but all is gone dark before my eyes."

"Dark, do you say? May the gods have mercy upon you! What do you mean? Dark?"

"Yes, with a darkness that is terrible and unfathomable. And out of that darkness something is advancing towards me—something of which, for some reason or other, I am afraid."

"I have always thought that sorcerers exist. Do you have bad dreams at present?"

"No, for I cannot sleep at all. The thought of the torturing of these people has prevented me from so doing."

"Then you are sorry for them?"

"No; but why should so much blood have been shed? You heard what that man on the cross said? Evil is awaiting us."

"Yes, I *did* hear what that man said," muttered Vestinus in a lower voice. "But those people were incendiaries."

"No, that is untrue."

"And enemies of the human race."

"That also is untrue."

"And poisoners of fountains."

"Untrue, untrue!"

"And devourers of children."

"Untrue, untrue, I tell you!"

"What?" asked Vestinus in astonishment. "Do you yourself, who betrayed them to Tigellinus, say that?"

"Yes, for I am wrapped in darkness, and death is advancing towards me. Sometimes I seem to be dead already, and you yourselves to be dead also."

"No, it is the Christians who are dead. *We* are alive.

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But tell me: what is it that these people see as they are dying?"

"They see Christ."

"Their God, you mean? Is he a powerful God?"

Chilo answered with a counter-question:

"What sort of torches are they going to burn in the Gardens? Did you hear what Cæsar said?"

"Yes, I heard, and I know. The torches are to be what are known as sarmentitii and semaxii. That is to say, the Christians are to be wrapped in the condemned shift, tied to stakes, soaked in oil, and set on fire. May their God not send fresh disasters upon the city in revenge! Semaxii—it is a most terrible form of torture!"

"Nevertheless I would rather witness it than the other forms, for it causes no blood to flow. . . . Pray bid a slave raise this cup to my lips, for I am thirsty, and my hand so shakes with old age that I spill the wine."

Chilo's companions also were discussing the Christians.

Old Domitius Afer had not a single good word for them.

"They had become so numerous," he said, "that they might have fomented a civil war. Yet, would you believe it?—they actually declined to accept weapons in the arena to defend themselves with! Moreover, they are people who die like sheep."

"Let them try to do otherwise!" said Tigellinus menacingly.

"You are wrong," put in Petronius. "They *do* arm themselves."

"With what, pray?"

"With fortitude."

"It is a new weapon indeed!"

"Possibly. But can you say that they die like ordinary criminals? No. They die as though the criminals in the matter were the men who condemn them to death. I refer to ourselves and to the Roman people generally."

"What rubbish!" cried Tigellinus.

"What a prince of fools!" retorted Petronius.

Some of those present, struck with the justice of what Petronius had said, looked at one another in astonishment, and repeated:

"It is true. There is something out of the common in the manner in which these Christians meet death."

"And I, for my part, assert that, in dying, they behold their deity," added Vestinus.

Upon this some of the Augustans turned to Chilo.

"Hi, old man!" they cried. "Do you who know them so well tell us what it is they behold."

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The Greek gave a gulp, spat out upon his tunic the wine which he had just drunk, and replied:

"They behold the Resurrection!"

And with that he became seized with such violent shudderings that those who were seated near him burst into roars of laughter.

XIX

For some time past Vinicius had been spending his nights away from home. Petronius told himself that possibly his nephew had on foot some new scheme for rescuing Lygia from the Esquiline prison, but forbore to question him, lest he should bring misfortune upon the supposed enterprise. Ever since he had failed to deliver Lygia from the Mamertine gaol he had lost faith in his lucky star.

Nor did he now count upon the successful issue of Vinicius' attempts. Though the Esquiline prison, which had been hastily constructed by connecting together the cellars of various houses which had been demoished in order to isolate the flames, was not as terrible a place as was the old tullianum of the Capitol, it was a hundred times more strictly guarded, and Petronius had not the slightest doubt that the reason why Lygia had been transferred thither was that she might not die of fever, and so escape death in the arena.

"One thing is certain," he said to himself: "and that is that Cæsar and Tigellinus are reserving her for a special spectacle that shall be more atrocious than all the rest. Vinicius will ruin himself to no purpose."

Vinicius too had lost faith in his own initiative. Only Christ could save her. The one thing left to the young man was to devise a means of seeing her in prison. He knew that, in spite of all obstacles, Nazarus had succeeded in gaining access to the place, as a remover of corpses; and the thought haunted him until eventually he decided to try a similar resource. In return for an immense sum the superintendent of the Burial Pits added him to the staff which was nightly dispatched to the various prisons to inquire for bodies of the dead. That done, he knew that the darkness of the night, his slave's costume, the rags, soaked with terebinthine, in which his head would be wrapped, and the miserable lighting of the prisons would help to conceal his identity. Besides, who would ever have dreamt that a patrician, the son and the grandson of consuls, would be figuring in the habiliments worn by grave-diggers, who were exposed to the infectious emanations of

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the gaols and of the Burial Pits? Who would ever have dreamt that such a man could adopt a pursuit to which only the blackest of destitution or the condition of slavery was capable of reducing a human being?

When the centurion had examined the corpse-removers' badges the great iron gate of the prison was opened, and Vinicius saw before him a huge vault whence access could be obtained to a number of smaller cellars. A few lanterns shed a dim light over the scene, which was swarming with prisoners. Some of the latter, stretched along the walls, were asleep; others were sitting with their elbows on their knees, and their faces buried in their hands. Here and there an infant was lying pressed to its mother's bosom, and from every side came the sound of coughs, sobs, muttered prayers, hymns intoned under the breath, and blasphemous exclamations of gaolers.

Everywhere there reigned an odour of corpses and human sweat. In dark corners there crouched dim figures whose features were indistinguishable, while under the flickering lanterns there could be discerned white faces with hollow cheeks, eyes strained or feverish-looking, and bluish lips—the whole surmounted with hair that was plastered to the forehead with perspiration. Some of these ailing folk were uttering cries in their delirium, while others were calling for water, or begging to be put to death.

Vinicius' knees tottered under him as he gazed at these things. The mere thought that Lygia was in this Gehenna caused his hair to bristle and his throat to contract. The amphitheatre, the fangs of wild beasts, the cross—anything would be better than these frightful dungeons, which were full of putrescent corpses!

"How many have died to-day?" asked the superintendent of the Burial Pits.

"About a dozen," replied the governor of the prison. "By to-morrow morning there will be more, for some of those along the wall are already at their last gasp."

With that he fell to railing against women who concealed their dead children in order to keep them the longer. Such corpses, it appeared, could be traced only by the smell.

"I would rather be a slave serving a sentence in a country prison," he concluded, "than have to watch over dogs who rot even before they are dead."

The superintendent of the Burial Pits consoled him by saying that his (the superintendent's) lot was equally unenviable.

Meanwhile Vinicius had been fruitlessly searching for Lygia, until at length he had been forced to suppose that never again should he see her alive. The number of cellars

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which were connected with one another by passages freshly hewn in the walls was about a dozen, and the grave-diggers entered only those of them which they knew to contain corpses. Consequently it was a terrible thing for him to have to think that what had cost him so much labour to achieve was destined to go for nothing.

Fortunately the keeper of the Burial Pits came to his assistance.

"The corpses must be removed at once," he said, "if you gaolers are not to die as well as the prisoners."

"There are only ten of us for all the dungeons," replied the head gaoler; "and even of those a few must sleep."

"Then I will leave you four of my men, and they shall make a tour of the cellars, to see if there are any more corpses."

"If you will do that, I will take care that you have something to drink to-morrow. But, first of all, each body must be taken to the office, for orders have been given that the throat of every corpse is to be cut before being removed to the Burial Pits."

"Good! Then you shall send me some wine."

The superintendent of the Burial Pits detailed the four men in question—one of them being Vinicius—and set them to collect the dead on stretchers.

Vinicius breathed afresh. Now at least he would find Lygia again. He explored the first of the cellars in detail, but found nothing; nor in the second and third cellars did his search meet with better results. It was now growing late, and the corpses had been removed, while the gaolers had stretched themselves out in the passages separating the cellars, and gone to sleep. Even the children had worn themselves out with weeping, and fallen to silence. Nowhere was a sound to be heard save the laboured breathing of overcharged bosoms and, here and there, the muttering of a prayer.

Suddenly, as Vinicius entered a fourth cellar that was smaller than the preceding ones, and raised his lantern, he gave a start. Beneath the bars of a ventilator he seemed to have caught sight of the gigantic outlines of Ursus. Hastily blowing out his lantern, he approached the Lygian.

"Is that you, Ursus?" he inquired.

The giant raised his head.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"Do you not recognise me?"

"How can I recognise you when you have blown out the lantern?"

But Vinicius had caught sight also of Lygia, stretched out upon a cloak beside the wall; and without a further word

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he knelt down by her side. Then Ursus recognised him, and said:

"Blessed be Christ! Yet do not wake her, my lord."

Vinicius looked at her through his tears. In spite of the darkness, he could see that her face was pale as marble, and that her shoulders were wasted. The sight filled him with a yearning love that was almost an agony of pain—with a love that was full of pity, of veneration, and of respect. He fell with his face to the earth, and pressed his lips to the hem of the cloak on which the young girl was lying.

For a long time Ursus looked at him in silence. Then, plucking his tunic, he said:

"My lord, how did you obtain admittance? Have you come to save her?"

Vinicius rose to his feet.

"Show me how to do that!" he exclaimed.

"I was hoping that you had already found a means, my lord. The only means of which I can think is—" And he glanced towards the bars of the ventilator. Then, as though answering himself, he added:

"Yes; but behind those bars are soldiers."

"A hundred Prætorians," assented Vinicius.

"Could we not make our way through them?"

"No."

The Lygian rubbed his brows, and again put the question:

"How did you obtain admittance?"

"Through a badge, as a remover of corpses." Then like lightning an idea flashed through his brain.

"By the Saviour's Passion," he went on, "but I could do this. I could remain here, and let Lygia take this badge, wrap her head in this linen, throw this cloak around her, and leave the prison in my stead. There are several young men among the superintendent's staff, so that the Prætorians would not recognise her; and, once she had gained Petronius' house, she would be safe."

With lowered head the Lygian replied:

"She would never consent to the plan, for she loves you. Moreover, she is ill, and unable to stand upright. If Petronius and yourself, my lord, have failed to rescue her, who else shall do it?"

"Christ—and Christ alone."

For a while the pair remained silent. Deep down in his simple heart the Lygian was thinking: "Yes, Christ could save us all; so, if He has not done so, it means that the hour of punishment and of death has arrived." Death for himself he feared not, but from the bottom of his soul he grieved for the child who had grown up in his arms, and whom he loved better than his own life.

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Suddenly Lygia opened her eyes, and laid her burning hands upon those of Vinicius.

"Ah, I can see you!" she exclaimed. "I *knew* that you would come!"

"Yes, I am come, my beloved! May Christ take you under His protection, and save you, my darling Lygia!"

More he could not say, lest he should betray his grief in her presence.

"I am ill, Marcus," she went on, "and whether it be here or in the arena, I must die. But in my prayers I asked to see you before I departed, and Christ has heard me, for you are come!"

Still he could not speak—still he could only clasp her to his breast. So she continued:

"Yes, I knew that you would come, and that to-day the Saviour would permit us to say farewell to one another. Though I am soon going to Him, I love you, Marcus, and shall always love you."

Vinicius mastered himself, choked down his grief, and said in a voice which he forced to calmness:

"My beloved, you shall not die. The Apostle bid me have faith, since he also would pray for you. He himself has known Christ; and Christ, who loved him, can refuse him nothing. Had you been ordained to die, Peter would never have bidden me have faith. Yet he said to me, 'Only have faith.' No, Lygia; Christ will show us His compassion—He will not let you die, He will not suffer such a thing to come about. By the name of the Saviour I swear to you that Peter also is offering up prayer on your behalf."

The solitary lantern which was suspended over the door had gone out, but a stream of moonlight was entering through the ventilator. In the opposite corner a child gave a wail, then hushed again. From without came the voices of Prætorians who, having been relieved from guard, were playing at scriptæ duodecim under the prison wall.

At length Lygia replied:

"Marcus, Christ Himself once cried, 'My Father, if it be Thy will, suffer this cup to pass from Me!' Yet He drank that cup to the dregs, and died upon the Cross. Thousands also are perishing for His sake. Why, therefore, should I alone be spared? Who am I, Marcus? Have I not heard Peter say that he too will suffer martyrdom? What am I as compared with him? When the Prætorians first came to seek us I felt afraid of death and torture; but now I no longer fear them. See what a terrible place this prison is: why, therefore, should I not rejoice to leave it for Heaven? Remember that here below there is Cæsar, but that

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in Heaven there is the Saviour, who is kind and pitiful. There death does not exist at all. Do you who love me think how happy I shall be with Him! Do you who love me remember that one day you will rejoin me on high."

For a moment she paused to recover her breath; then she took Vinicius by the hand, and said as she raised it to her lips:

"Marcus."

"Yes, beloved?"

"You must not weep for me. Remember always that soon you will be at my side again in Heaven. My life will not have been a very long one, but God has given me your soul for a precious possession, and I shall be able to tell Christ, when I meet Him, that, though I am dead, and you have seen me die, and you are left desolate here on earth, you did not oppose His will. *He* will reunite us, and I shall always love you and be with you."

Again breath failed her, and she concluded in scarcely audible accents:

"Promise me this, Marcus."

"Yes, by the sacred Head of God, I promise it!"

Then through the darkness he saw Lygia's face grow radiant. Once again she raised his hand to her lips as she murmured:

"Your wife—at last I am your wife!"

On the other side of the prison walls the Prætorians who had been playing at scriptæ duodecim had begun to quarrel; but within those walls there were souls who had forgotten gaol, gaolers, and the world alike, and who, communing together, could seek refuge in prayer to God.

XX

For three days—or, rather, for three nights—nothing disturbed their happiness. As soon as the task of separating the living from the dead had been performed, the weary gaolers would stretch themselves out in the corridors, and permit of Vinicius entering Lygia's cell, and not leaving it until the bars of the ventilator had begun to show forth the light of dawn. Lygia would lie with her head upon Vinicius' breast, and together they would talk of love and of death. In these interviews—indeed, in their every thought and desire and hope—they grew to detach themselves more and more from life. They resembled navigators who, having left the land far behind them, can no longer discern the immensity of the ocean and the sky, but go

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sailing slowly onwards into the infinite. Whenever, in the morning, Vinicius left the prison he saw the world and the city and his friends and the ordinary objects of life as in a dream. All seemed strange and distant; all seemed empty and ephemeral. Even the imminence of death by torture had ceased to intimidate him, for he felt that it was possible to pass through martyrdom in a state of absorption, with the sufferer's eyes fixed elsewhere. As he and Lygia confided their love to one another they would tell themselves how great their mutual affection would be, and how they would live together, not upon earth, but in the world beyond the grave. And if at times their thoughts turned to things of earth they spoke as travellers who, before departing on a far journey, discuss the preparations necessary for the same. Otherwise they remained wrapped in the peace which envelops two solitary, disregarded monoliths. Their one desire was that Christ would not separate them; and the ever-growing conviction that He would grant them their desire caused them to love Him as the binding force which would for ever unite them in infinite love and boundless peace. The dust of earth they had already shaken off, and their souls were being purified to the clarity of a tear. Though under the shadow of death, and surrounded by suffering and misery, and stretched upon a prison pallet, they yet felt that they had entered Heaven. Taking Vinicius by the hand, Lygia, saved and sanctified, was leading her lover towards the inexhaustible source of life.

Petronius could not understand why Vinicius' face had come to be charged with a deeper restfulness than it had ever before manifested. At times he began to think that his nephew must have devised a new scheme of rescue, and felt hurt that it should not have been confided to him at once. At length he could not forbear saying:

"You seem altogether changed now. I pray you, do not treat me as a stranger, since I both wish and have the power to be useful to you. Have you come across anything fresh?"

"Yes," replied Vinicius; "and it is something wherein you could not help me. After she is dead I intend to confess my faith openly, and to follow her."

"Then you have abandoned all hope?"

"Christ will restore her to me, and we shall never again be separated."

"You need not look to your Christ for that: Thanatos could render you the same service."

"No, my friend. You cannot understand what I mean."

"No, I cannot, and do not wish to, understand. This

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is not the moment for discussing the point, but do you remember what you said to me the night when we failed to rescue Lygia from the tullianum? *I* had lost all hope, but *you* remarked as we re-entered the villa: 'In spite of everything, I believe that Christ can restore her to me.' Restore her to you, indeed! If I were to throw a goblet into the sea, none of our ancient gods could recover that goblet; and if your deity does not go to any greater trouble than that to please you, I cannot see why I should pay him a whit more honour than I do to the older deities."

"Not only that, but He will restore me to *her*," said Vinicius.

Petronius shrugged his shoulders.

"Are you aware," he remarked, "that to-morrow the Gardens of Cæsar are going to be illuminated with living torches, in the shape of Christians?"

"To-morrow?" re-echoed Vinicius.

With a heart quivering with distress and terror he hastened to the superintendent of the Burial Pits, in order to obtain from that functionary his badge; but a new disappointment awaited him, for the superintendent declined to hand over the tessera.

"Pardon me, my lord," he said. "I have done all that I could for you, but I dare not risk my life. To-night the Christians are to be removed to Cæsar's Gardens, and the prison will be full of soldiers and officials. Should you be recognised, I should be lost, and my children with me."

Vinicius understood that it would be useless to insist further. Nevertheless there remained to him a ray of hope in the thought that perhaps some of the soldiers who had seen him before would allow him to pass without a badge. When night came he, as usual, donned a ragged tunic, swathed his face in linen, and repaired to the prison.

Unfortunately, that night the badges were scrutinised more carefully than usual; and, to complete the catastrophe, the centurion Scævinius—a soldier strict in general, and devoted, body and soul, to Cæsar in particular—recognised Vinicius.

Yet even within that mail-clad breast there lurked a spark of pity for unfortunate humanity. Instead of giving the alarm by striking the point of his spear against his buckler, the centurion took Vinicius aside, and said:

"Return home, my lord. I have recognised you, but have no wish to ruin you by speaking out. At the same time I cannot grant you admittance, so I would pray you to depart, in the hope that the gods may send you consolation."

"Yes, I understand that you cannot grant me admittance," replied Vinicius; "but suffer me to remain

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here, and to watch the departure of those about to be removed."

"That at least will not be contrary to my orders."

So Vinicius took up a position before the main gate, to wait till the condemned should issue thence. At length, towards midnight, the gate opened to vomit forth a crowd of men, women, and children, surrounded by a detachment of Prætorians. The night was clear, for the moon was shining brightly, and it was an easy matter to distinguish the prisoners' features. The Christians walked two and two in a long, mournful procession—the silence broken only by the clanking of the soldiers' accoutrements. So numerous were the prisoners that it would appear as though every dungeon must now be empty. Among them Vinicius distinctly recognised Glaucus the physician; but he also perceived that neither Lygia nor Ursus was among the throng of those brought forth to die.

XXI

DARKNESS had not completely set in when the populace began to direct its steps towards the Gardens of Cæsar. Dressed in holiday attire, and crowned with flowers, the people marched, singing gaily, to witness a new and splendid spectacle. Almost every man was drunk, and the cries of "The semaxii, the sarmentitii!" resounded throughout the whole of that quarter of Rome. Once before the city had been regaled with the spectacle of persons being burnt alive at the stake; but never before had the number of condemned approached its present proportions. Wishing to make a comprehensive clearance of the Christians, as well as to arrest the progress of the gaol fever which was spreading from the prisons to the city at large, Cæsar and Tigellinus had completely emptied the dungeons, until there remained in them only a few score persons who were to be reserved for the close of the games. The result was that, on passing the entrance-gates of the Gardens, the crowd halted in stupefaction: for every avenue—both those which led to the thickets and those which traversed the meadows—as well as every clump of trees, the banks of every pond, and the borders of every parterre of flowers, stood picked out with resin-soaked stakes to which Christians had been bound!

From the summits of the knolls, whence the view was not obscured by the curtain of trees, there could be seen long lines of bodies adorned with flowers, ivy, and myrtle-

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leaves. Topping the heights, and descending into the hollows, they extended such distances that the nearest stakes looked like ships' masts, and the furthest like a multi-coloured jumble of flower-bedecked thyrsi.

Soon darkness fell, and the first stars began to shine forth. By the side of every condemned person slaves armed with torches stationed themselves; and as soon as a trumpet sounded, as a signal for the spectacle to commence, each slave applied his torch to the base of the stake beside which he was standing.

Upon this the straw, saturated with oil, which was concealed beneath the garlands blazed up into a flame which, ever increasing, soon caused the wreaths of ivy to unroll, until the fire had begun to lick the feet of the victims. The spectators remained silent, but from the Gardens there went up one gigantic groan, compounded of thousands of wails of agony. Nevertheless many of the victims, with eyes raised to the star-bespangled heavens, started to sing hymns to the glory of Christ; and as the people listened, the hearts of even the most hardened among them contracted for a moment as from the summits of the smaller stakes there came the piteous voices of children crying, "Mother, mother!" while ruffians in the most advanced stage of intoxication could not repress a shudder at the sight of innocent, childish faces contracted with torture or half-veiled by the smoke which was already suffocating some of the victims. Still the flames mounted upwards as, one by one, they consumed the garlands of ivy and roses. Both the principal avenues and those which ran crosswise were now a sea of fire; and every clump of trees, every lawn, and every flower-bed was brilliantly illuminated with a light which awoke countless reflections in the ponds and basins, and tinted the trembling leaves with rose-colour. The place seemed to be plunged in daylight. Everywhere throughout the Gardens there hung the smell of roasting flesh, even though from time to time slaves stationed beside braziers which had been set between the stakes heaped those vessels with fresh myrrh and aloes. Here and there among the crowd there would arise cries of pity in addition to the shouts of joyous intoxication; and these cries kept growing louder in proportion as the fire increased—in proportion as it enveloped stakes, crept upwards towards breasts, twisted hair with its burning breath, threw a veil over blackened faces, and then rose yet higher, as though to proclaim the triumph and the victory of the force which had been unchained.

As soon as the spectacle had begun Cæsar appeared among his people in a splendid quadriga drawn by four

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white racing stallions. Clad in a chariot-driver's costume which was designed to include the colours of the Greens (those of his own and the Court party in general), he was followed by a number of other chariots, full of splendidly dressed courtiers, of Senators, of priests, of naked, rose-garlanded bacchantes who, drunk, and holding cups of wine in their hands, kept uttering wild cries, and of musicians who, costumed to represent fauns or satyrs, were playing harps, lutes, fifes, and horns. In other chariots there rode matrons and virgins of Roman families—all equally drunken and half-naked; while on either side of these chariots walked Greek youths, brandishing thyrsi adorned with ribands, or playing on tambourines, or strewing flowers in front of the horses' hoofs. Thus amid smoke and the lines of human torches the procession made its way to the principal avenue—there to be greeted with shouts of "Evohe, evohé!" Cæsar, who had at his side Tigellinus and Chilo (the nervous terror of the latter greatly amused him), drove his horses at a foot's pace, the better to view the flaming bodies, and to listen to the acclamations of his people; and as he advanced, his monstrous arms, stretched lengthwise by the reins, seemed to be making a gesture of benediction over the mob, while his face and half-closed eyes were smiling, and his garlanded head seemed to be shining above his people like the head of a god, or even like the sun itself.

Every now and then he would halt before some virgin whose breast was beginning to crackle in the flame, or before some child whose face was contracted with agony. Then he would continue his progress, with, behind him, his train of drunken, straggling, uproarious attendants. At intervals he would salute the people, or, leaning back, and supported by the gilded reins, engage in conversation with Tigellinus. At length, arrived at a great fountain where two avenues crossed one another, he descended from his chariot, signed to his companions, and plunged into the crowd.

There he was received with renewed cries and applause. Bacchantes, nymphs, Augustans, priests, fauns, satyrs, and soldiers surrounded him in a frenzied ring, while around the edge of the fountain a hundred fresh torches blazed forth, of which Cæsar made a tour—stopping every now and then to make a remark on the victims, or to rally Chilo, whose face was full of unutterable despair.

At length the party arrived at an exceptionally tall stake that was ornamented with myrtle and festooned with ivy. The ruddy flames were licking the knees of the victim, but his face was indistinguishable, owing to smoke thrown off by the green branches as they caught fire. Suddenly the

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night wind blew aside the smoke, and exposed the head of an old, grey-bearded man. At the sight Chilo shrank back like a wounded serpent, and uttered a cry which resembled the croak of a raven rather than the sound of a human voice.

"Glaucus! Glaucus!" he shrieked.

From the summit of the blazing stake Glaucus the physician looked down upon him. With his sad face bent forward, he gazed at the man who had betrayed him, who had robbed him of wife and children, who had inveigled him into a den of villains, and who, after all had been forgiven him in the name of Christ, had once more delivered his benefactor to the executioners. Glaucus' eyes were riveted to the face of the Greek. Every now and then the smoke would veil those eyes, but each stirring of the breeze caused Chilo once more to see them piercing his very soul. He tried to turn and flee, but could not. As though petrified, he remained standing where he was. His one sensation was that something in him had broken, and had shattered everything—that the end was come, that Cæsar and Cæsar's Court and the crowd were growing dim before his sight, and that around him there was only a terrible limitless, lightless void in which, like two points of fire, the eyes of a martyr were summoning him before his Judge. The other, ever drooping his head, continued to gaze at him. All who were near felt conscious that something was passing between these two men. Yet laughter died on every lip, for Chilo's face had grown terrible to look upon—it was as though it was *his* body that the tongues of fire were licking. Suddenly he staggered, threw up his arms, and cried in a voice at once horrible and heartrending:

"Glaucus! In the name of Christ! Forgive me!"

All around them ceased speaking, and a shudder ran through the crowd as every eye raised itself to the stake.

The martyr's head nodded gently, and from the summit of the stake there came, in a stifled voice that was half a groan, the words:

"I forgive you."

With a cry like that of a wild beast Chilo fell forward upon his face, and, digging his hands into the ground, scattered earth upon his head. Suddenly the flames spurted forth, enveloped Glaucus' breast and face, unrolled the crown of myrtle from his head, and devoured the ribands which had adorned the shaft of the stake—the latter now flaming up into a column of dazzling brilliancy.

When Chilo arose his countenance was so transformed that the Augustans seemed to see before them another man. His eyes were shining with an extraordinary brightness, and

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his wrinkled forehead seemed so to diffuse ecstasy that he who but a moment before had been a feeble old coward now seemed to have become a priest inspired of God to reveal the eternal verities.

"What has happened to him? He is mad!" murmured several voices.

As they did so he turned towards the crowd, raised his right hand, and said—or, rather, cried—in a voice so piercing that not only the Augustans, but also the populace at large, caught the words:

"Roman people, on my life do I swear that innocent persons are perishing! *He, he* is the incendiary!"—and he pointed his finger at Nero.

For a moment there was silence. The courtiers stood petrified. Still Chilo kept pointing his trembling hand, with its accusing finger, at Cæsar. Then a tumult broke forth. Like the billows of the sea when suddenly unchained by a squall, the people rushed towards the old man, to get a better view of him. Some voices cried out, "Hold him!" and others, "Alas, alas, we have been betrayed!" Every moment the uproar was increasing, and the bacchantes, uttering piercing screams, began to run towards the chariots amid a perfect storm of hoots, whistles, and shouts of "Ahenobarbus! Matricide! Incendiary!" Suddenly some stakes which had become burnt through fell amid a shower of sparks, and a blind stampede of the surrounding spectators carried Chilo away towards the other end of the Gardens.

Everywhere charred stakes were beginning to fall across the paths, and to fill the avenues with smoke, sparks, the smell of burnt wood, and the odour of human grease. Also, the lanterns had become extinguished, and the Gardens were plunged in darkness. Terrified, anxious, and menacing, the people crowded towards the gates, while ever the news of what had happened kept passing from mouth to mouth, changing form as it did so, and growing in proportion. Some said that Cæsar had fainted; others that he had confessed to having originated the fire; others that he had been seized with a dangerous illness, and been taken away for dead on his chariot. Here and there, also, words of pity for the Christians made themselves heard. "If it was not they who burnt Rome, why should there have been this shedding of blood and unjust torturing? Will not the gods wreak vengeance for the death of these innocents, and what expiatory offerings can avail to avert the divine wrath?"

The words "these innocents" began to be repeated with increasing insistence. Women wept aloud with pity for

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the many children who had been thrown to the wild beasts, or nailed to crosses, or burnt alive in those accursed Gardens. And by degrees that pity gave place to curses upon the heads of Cæsar and Tigellinus. Suddenly a group of people halted, and exclaimed: "Who is the deity which could give these victims such fortitude in the face of torture and death?" Then they entered their houses, absorbed in thought.

Meanwhile Chilo was wandering about the Gardens, unconscious of which direction he was taking. Every now and then he brushed against half-charred corpses, or clutched at smouldering remains which covered him with showers of angry sparks. Then he would seat himself, and gaze around him with unseeing eyes. The Gardens were almost wholly wrapped in darkness, but between the trees a few straggling beams of moonlight sufficed to throw an uncertain glow over the avenues, over the charred stakes which had fallen across them, and over human trunks which had become transformed to shapeless blocks. Ever amid the moonbeams the old Greek seemed to discern the face of Glaucus, with its flashing eyes; and as often as he did so he would rise and flee from the light. At length, emerging out of a dark shadow, he found that some irresistible force had led him back to the fountain where Glaucus had yielded up his life.

At this moment a hand touched his shoulder.

The old man turned, and, seeing before him an unknown man, cried:

"What is it? Who are you?"

"I am an Apostle—Paul of Tarsus."

"And I am a man accursed. What is it you desire?"

"I desire to save you."

Chilo staggered against a tree.

"For me no salvation is possible," he said dully.

"Then do you not know that Christ pardoned the thief upon the cross?"

"And do *you* not know what I—yes, what *I*—have done?"

"Yes; but also I have seen your sorrow, and have heard you testify to the truth."

"O my lord, my lord!"

"And if that servant of Christ could forgive you in the hour of agony and of death, will not Christ Himself forgive you?"

Chilo seized his head in his two hands, as though he could feel himself going mad.

"Forgiveness?" he said. "Forgiveness—for *me*?"

"Yes," replied Paul; "for our God is a God of mercy."

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"For me?" groaned Chilo again.

"Lean upon my arm," said the Apostle, "and come with me."

They moved away towards the junction of the two main avenues—guided thither by the plashing sound of the fountain, which, in the night stillness, seemed to be weeping over the bodies of the martyrs.

"Yes, our God is a God of mercy," repeated the Apostle. "With how many pebbles, cast into the waters, could you hope to fill up the abyss of the sea? And the mercy of Christ is as the abyss of the sea; and in it all the sins and the faults of men are swallowed up as are the pebbles in the belly of the ocean. The mercy of Christ is like also unto the heavens which cover the mountains, the earth, and the sea; for everywhere it is present, and to it are there set no bounds. You suffered in soul before the stake whereon Glaucus was hanging, and Christ saw your suffering. You cried aloud, without a thought of what may befall you on the morrow, '*He, he* is the incendiary!' and Christ will not forget your words. Yes, your unworthiness and your deceitfulness have come to an end, and in your heart there remains only a boundless repentance. Come, therefore, to me, and listen. I too once hated Him. I too once persecuted His elect. I too once yearned not for Him, nor believed in Him. Then one day He appeared unto me, and called me: and since that day I have loved none but Him. Listen, therefore. He has sent you this remorse and this fear and this sorrow that He may call you to Himself. Though you hated Him, He has always loved you. Though you have delivered over His children unto torture, He wishes to pardon you, and to save you."

Paul had captivated his hearer, had conquered him, was leading him away as a soldier escorts a prisoner.

"Come with me," he went on, "and I will bring you to His presence. Why have I sought you out? Because He has bidden me gather in souls through the power of His love, and I must accomplish His will. You have said to me, '*I am a man accursed*'; but *I* say to *you*, '*Only have faith, and you will be saved.*' You have said to me, '*I am a man beyond redemption*'; but *I* say to *you*, '*He loves you.*' Look at me. In the days when I hated Him, only hatred dwelt in my heart; but now that I no longer hate Him, the love of Him has taken the place of love of father and mother, has cast out the thought of riches and pomp. In Him alone is there salvation, in Him alone is there the power to take your repentance into account. He shall look upon your misery, He shall remove from you all fear, He shall raise you up, and seat you beside Himself!"

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The spray of the fountain was gleaming silver in the rays of the moon. All around was calm and in solitude, for in this quarter of the Gardens slaves had cleared away the charred stakes, together with the bodies of the martyrs.

Chilo fell upon his knees, buried his face in his hands, and remained thus without speaking. Paul raised his eyes to the stars, and prayed:

"O Lord, look down upon this sinner—upon his repentance, upon his tears, upon his agony! O God of mercy who hast given Thy blood for our sins, I beseech Thee by Thy Passion, by Thy Death, and by Thy Resurrection to pardon this soul!"

Then for a long while the Apostle prayed in silence, still gazing at the stars. Suddenly from Chilo, crouching at his feet, there came a groan. "O Christ, O Christ, pardon me!" he cried.

Paul approached the fountain, took thence some water in the palms of his hands, and returned to the kneeling wretch.

"Chilo," he said, "I baptise thee in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost! Amen!"

Chilo raised his head, and stretched out his arms. As he did so the moon shed a tender glow over his white hair and fixed, pale features. Gradually the night was gliding by. From the great aviaries of the Gardens there came to them the sound of a cock saluting the dawn. Yet still Chilo knelt where he was, a statue of sorrow.

At length he asked:

"What more ought I to do before death shall come to me?"

Paul awoke from his meditations on the measureless power to which even souls like that of this Greek were fain to submit themselves, and replied:

"Have faith, and testify to the truth."

Then they departed together. At the gates of the Gardens the Apostle blessed the old man once more, and they took leave of one another. Chilo had demanded this to be done, since he foresaw that Cæsar and Tigellinus would have him pursued.

Nor was he mistaken. On reaching home, he found the house surrounded by Prætorians, who straightway seized him, and led him away to the Palatine.

Cæsar had retired to rest, but Tigellinus was still on duty. He greeted the Greek with a calm, but menacing, face.

"You have committed the crime of offering an insult to the Sovereign," he said; "nor shall you escape the punishment for that crime. Yet if to-morrow, from the centre of the arena, you will declare that you were drunk and had

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not your wits about you, as well as that the Christians were the true originators of the fire, your chastisement shall be limited to stripes and exile."

"I cannot, my lord," said Chilo gently.

Tigellinus approached him with long strides, and said in a muffled, but terrible, voice:

"What? You cannot, you dog of a Greek? You were *not* drunk? Then, if you do not yet understand what is awaiting you, look there!"

He pointed to a corner of the atrium in which, beside a large wooden bench, four Thracian slaves were standing, armed with cords and pincers.

Chilo repeated:

"I cannot, my lord."

Fury was boiling in Tigellinus' heart, but still he kept a rein over himself.

"You have seen the Christians die," he said. "Do *you* wish to die as they did?"

The old man raised his white face, and for a moment his lips moved in silence. Then he said:

"I also believe in Christ."

Tigellinus looked at him in amazement.

"You dog!" he shouted. "Without a doubt you have gone mad!"

Leaping upon Chilo, he seized him by the beard, brought him to the ground, and stamped upon him again and again, his lips foaming.

"You shall retract!" he kept shouting. "You shall retract, you shall retract!"

"I cannot," groaned the Greek once more under Tigellinus' heels.

"Then away with the fellow to the torture!"

The Thracians seized the old man, threw him down upon the bench, tied him with cords, and began to crush his lean calves between their pincers. Yet all the while that they were binding him the old man even kissed their hands! Then he closed his eyes, and remained motionless, as though dead.

Yet he was still alive, for when Tigellinus bent over him, and once more put the question, "Will you retract?" Chilo's white lips moved feebly, and there escaped from them, in a scarcely audible whisper, the words:

"I—can—not."

Tigellinus signed for the torture to cease, and fell to pacing the atrium. At length a new idea seemed to strike him. Turning to the Thracians, he said:

"Tear out his tongue!"

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XXII

IN order to give a representation of the drama "Aureolus," the theatres and amphitheatres of Rome were accustomed so to arrange their stages as to permit of the latter being opened out to form two separate scenes. However, after the spectacle in Cæsar's Gardens the ordinary arrangements were dispensed with, since it was designed that all the spectators should witness the death of the crucified slave who, in the play, is devoured by a bear. Usually the part of the latter was taken by an actor clothed in a bearskin, but on this occasion the representation of it was to be "natural"—an invention of Tigellinus' own. At first Cæsar declared that he would not attend the performance; but, later, acting on his favourite's advice, he changed his mind. That is to say, Tigellinus explained to him that, after what had happened in the Gardens, it was more than ever necessary that he, Cæsar, should show himself in public. At the same time, he assured his master that the crucified slave should not insult him as Crispus had done. Lastly, to attract the people—now surfeited with such things—to the spectacle, promises were made of renewed largesses, and of a banquet in the brilliantly lighted amphitheatre.

At dusk the Circus was full to the roof. Also, the whole body of Augustans, with Tigellinus at their head, were present—though less for the purpose of enjoying the spectacle than for that of evincing their loyalty to Cæsar after the late incident, and of entertaining themselves with Chilo, of whom the whole city was talking. Only a few patricians, moved by feelings of humanity, begged Tigellinus to renounce these pursuits.

"Look where they are leading you," said Barcus Soranus. "Although your aim was to satisfy the populace's desire for vengeance, and to make the nation believe that justice was being meted out to the true culprits, you have attained an absolutely opposite result."

"Yes, that is true," added Antistius Verus. "Every one is now whispering that the Christians were innocent. If *that* is what you call cleverness, then Chilo was right when he said that your brains would not fill the cup of an acorn."

Tigellinus turned upon them.

"It is whispered," he snarled, "that your daughter, Barcus Soranus, and your wife, Antistius Verus, have shielded their Christian slaves from the justice of Cæsar."

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"It is not true!" cried Barcus anxiously.

"No, indeed!" added Antistius Verus with equal disquietude in his tones. "The truth is that your divorced wives are jealous of the virtue of mine, and wish to ruin her."

Others also were speaking of Chilo.

"What can have come to him?" said Eprius Marcellus. "He himself betrayed the Christians to Tigellinus. From a beggar he suddenly became rich, and might have ended his days in peace, and had a splendid funeral, and been awarded a monument on his tomb. Truly the man must have gone mad!"

"No, he has not gone mad; he has become a Christian," said Tigellinus.

"Impossible!" cried Vitellius.

"Was I not right?" put in Vestinus. "Did I not tell you that, though you might cut the throats of these Christians, it was ill making war upon their god? Never should such a one be made light of. Look at what has happened! For my own part, though I have not burnt Rome, I would, if Cæsar should permit me, lose not a moment in offering a hecatomb to the Christian deity. And it would be well if all of you were to follow my example."

"Tigellinus laughed when I said that the Christians were arming themselves," said Petronius. "Well, to that I would add that the Christians are winning victory after victory."

"How so, how so?" asked a score of voices.

"In this way. If a man like Chilo cannot resist them, who is to do so? And if you imagine that after each spectacle the number of Christians does not increase, you had better become menders of pans or shavers of chins, in order the better to learn what the people really think, and what is passing in the city."

"By the sacred peplum of Diana, but that is no more than the truth!" cried Vestinus.

Barcus turned to Petronius.

"What is it you actually mean?" he inquired.

"I am merely ending what you have begun. I say that enough blood has been shed."

Tigellinus smiled ironically.

"And I say," he remarked, "that a little more—just a little more—must be shed."

"Well," commented Petronius, "if the head which you have on your shoulders is not enough for you, you have another and a wooden one on the top of your staff."

The conversation was interrupted by Cæsar entering the balcony in company with Pythagoras. At once the drama

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of "Aureolus" began, although but little attention was bestowed upon it, owing to the fact that the thoughts of every one were occupied with the Greek. The mob also had had such a surfeit of tortures and blood that it grew weary, whistled, hurled impertinent cries at the Court, and noisily demanded that the bear scene should be hurried on, since that was all that interested it. Had it not been for this desire to see the condemned man, as well as for the expectation of largesses, the spectacle would not have held the people at all.

At length the expected moment arrived. First of all, some Circus attendants brought in a wooden cross, made low, so that when the bear rose on its hind legs it would be able to reach the victim's breast. Next, two men led in—or, rather, dragged in—Chilo, who, his legs having been broken, was unable to walk. With such expedition was he nailed to the cross that the Augustans were disappointed of being able to observe him at their leisure; and it was only after the cross had been raised to an upright position that every eye obtained a view of him. Yet few of those who beheld the spectacle were able to recognise in this old and naked man the Chilo of recent days. After the tortures inflicted by Tigellinus his face had become perfectly bloodless, except that on his beard, white with the burden of years, a red stain showed where his tongue had been torn out. So transparent was his skin that every bone could be distinguished; yet, full of sorrow though his face was, it was also as quiet and restful as that of a man asleep. Perhaps he was thinking of the thief on the cross whom Christ pardoned. Perhaps in his soul he was saying to the God of mercy: "O Lord, though I have been a venomous wretch, Thou Thyself knowest that I have been starved with hunger, and trampled under foot, and beaten and derided, all my life. Yes, I have been poor, O Lord, and very unhappy, and now they have tortured me, and nailed me to the cross. O God of pity, Thou wilt not reject me in the hour of death?" Peace seemed to have sunk deep, with repentance, into that mortified soul.

No one raised a shout of merriment, for in that old man there was something so peaceful, so frail, so defenceless, so weak that each man found himself wondering why a human being who was already at the point of death need have been further tortured and crucified. Among the Augustans Vestinus kept fidgeting about, and whispering in awestruck accents:

"See how these Christians die!"

The others, however, were looking anxiously for the appearance of the bear, while also secretly wishing that the

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spectacle would come to an end. At length the bear lurched heavily into the arena—turning from side to side its massive head, and always looking at the ground. It seemed to be wondering what was next to be done. Presently, on catching sight of the cross and the naked form, it approached them, and, raising itself upon its haunches, sniffed at the victim. After a moment, however, it lowered its forepaws again, seated itself at the foot of the cross, and remained there, growling gently, as though its beast's heart were sorry for the human wreck above it.

Upon this the Circus attendants tried to rouse the bear with cries, while the people still sat silent. Presently Chilo raised his head slowly, and let his eyes wander over the spectators. At some point among the topmost benches his gaze halted. As it did so his breast began to heave, and, to the amazement of the audience, his face lightened to a smile, his forehead grew radiant, his eyes turned heavenwards, and from under his heavy eyelids two tears slowly welled, and as slowly coursed over his cheeks.

Then he died.

Suddenly, from on high, near the velarium, a deep voice cried:

"Peace to the martyr!"

Lower down, in the amphitheatre, there hung only a brooding silence.

XXIII

THE spectacle in the Gardens of Cæsar had considerably depleted the prisons; and though people suspected of having yielded to "the Oriental superstition" continued to be arrested and thrown into gaol, the man-hunt, becoming less and less fruitful of results, had much ado to provide the number of victims necessary for the few remaining spectacles. The people, gorged with blood, had begun to evince an increasing weariness of such entertainments, as well as an increasing uneasiness, due to the extraordinary conduct of the condemned. In fact, the apprehensions of the superstitious Vestinus had seized upon every mind, and among the populace the wildest tales were in circulation as to the reprisals which the Christian deity was likely to exact. This uneasiness was added to by the fact that the typhoid fever which had ravaged the gaols had now spread to the city at large; with the result that burials had enormously augmented in frequency, and men kept for ever repeating that fresh propitiatory offerings were necessary to appease the unknown god. In the temples

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sacrifice was being made to Jupiter and to Libitina; but in spite of all—in spite of the best efforts of Tigellinus and his myrmidons—the rumour that the city had been fired by Cæsar's orders, and that the Christians were innocent, was gaining ground from day to day.

For this very reason Cæsar and Tigellinus were averse to calling a halt in their system of persecution. To calm the people new edicts were issued for further distributions of grain, wine, and olive-oil, and clauses added thereto which should facilitate the re-construction of the ruined mansions of the Quirites. Other regulations prescribed the width to be given to the new streets, and the kind of materials to be employed as a precaution against the occurrence of a second conflagration. Cæsar himself attended the sittings of the Senate, and consulted the Conscript Fathers with regard to the welfare of the people and of the city. Yet no quarter was allowed to the condemned, since, above all things, the "Lord of the World" wished to convince the mob that such an unprecedented system of repression could only be employed against genuine criminals. Not a voice in their favour was raised in the Senate, since no one cared to draw down upon himself the anger of Cæsar; and, moreover, those skilled in political matters declared that, put into practice, the new doctrine would shatter the bases of the Roman dominion.

Vinicius had now abandoned all hope of saving Lygia; and since he had taken leave of life he had concentrated his thoughts upon Christ, and looked to meet Lygia again only in eternity. He divined that she too was preparing herself for death, and that their souls, despite the walls which separated them, were advancing hand in hand: and as he looked forward to the future, he smiled, as though a great happiness were awaiting them both.

The same irrepressible torrent of faith as had detached so many thousands of converts from earth, and borne them beyond the tomb, had seized also upon Ursus. Once upon a time he had been unable to bear the thought of Lygia's death; but, since then, echoes had reached him of what was passing in the amphitheatres and in the Gardens of Cæsar, and death had come to seem to him a blessing far superior to any of which the mortal mind could conceive. Consequently he no longer had the courage to implore Christ to deprive Lygia of that blessing. In his simple soul the fact that he had heard that all people were equal in the sight of God did not debar him from imagining that a daughter of the Lygian kings must necessarily enjoy an exceptionally large share of the divine happiness that was promised, and that, in the eternal glory, a place by the very

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side of the Lamb would be assigned to his queen. Also, he felt sure that Christ would permit him, Ursus, to continue in her service. His secret desire was that he should suffer death on the cross, even as the Lamb of God had done; but since that seemed to him a happiness not to be looked for, he scarcely dared, for all that he knew that Rome meted out crucifixion only to the worst of criminals, to pray for such an end. Probably, he thought, he would be thrown to the wild beasts; and the expectation of this greatly vexed and disturbed him. From boyhood upwards he had dwelt in forests, and, thanks to his superhuman strength, had not attained man's estate before he had become famous among the Lygian people. The hunting of wild animals had been his favourite occupation, and even to-day the sight of such brutes in the vivaria or in the amphitheatres was able to awake in him a desire to wrestle with and to rend them. Consequently he feared lest, on the day when he should be forced to meet them in the arena, he might find himself assailed by thoughts unworthy of a Christian.

He spent his days in praying, in rendering his fellow prisoners various services, in helping the gaolers, and in comforting his young princess, who often confided to him her regret that during her brief life she had not succeeded in accomplishing as many good works as had been performed by Saint Thabita (whose life had been related to her by the Apostle Peter). The gaolers, who, at first, had been smitten with respect for the giant's frightful strength, ended by loving him for his gentleness. Often, amazed at his peaceful bearing, they asked him the cause of it; whereupon he would speak to them of the life which was to follow death, and with such unassailable conviction that they became lost in astonishment. How could these dens which the sun never visited be visited by such happiness? More than one gaoler told himself that his avocation was the avocation of a slave, and his life a life of misery. More than one of them began to think that only death could put an end to his misfortunes. Unfortunately death filled them with new fears, since they had nothing to hope for beyond it; whereas this giant and this virgin who, like a flower, could blossom even in a dungeon were going to their death as though they were approaching a gate which was to open up to them a realm of infinite bliss.

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XXIV

ONE evening Petronius received a visit from the Senator Scævinius, who launched out into a long conversation on the subject of the terrible times in which they were living. Also, he spoke of Cæsar, and so openly that Petronius, for all his relations of friendship with the Senator, resolved to be on his guard. The other, however, continued his complaints; saying that the world was turning upside down, that men had gone mad, and that things would end in a disaster still more terrible than the burning of Rome. Likewise he declared that the Augustans themselves were discontented; that Fenius Rufus, second in command of the Prætorians, strongly opposed the odious authority of Tigellinus; and that the whole family of Seneca were angry over Nero's conduct with regard to his old tutor and to Lucan. Finally, the Senator made a passing allusion to the irritation in general felt by the people, as also by the Prætorians, who were mostly on the side of Fenius Rufus.

"But why do you tell me all this?" asked Petronius.

"Because of my anxiety for Cæsar," replied Scævinius.

"I have a distant relative of the same name as myself, who is a Prætorian: from him I learn what is passing in the Prætorian camp, where, as elsewhere, discontent is on the increase. Caligula too went mad, and the result of it we know—namely, that he fell by the hand of Cassius Chærea. Of course that was a terrible crime to commit, and there is not a man among us who would approve of it; yet certain it is that Chærea rid the world of a monster."

"In other words," rejoined Petronius, "you reason as follows: 'I do not approve of Chærea, but he was the instrument of fate. May the gods send others like him!'"

Scævinius changed the subject to a eulogy of Piso. He spoke highly of Piso's birth, of his greatness of soul, of his affection for his wife, of his wisdom, of his self-possession, and of his rare gift of attracting and influencing his fellow men.

"Cæsar has no children," added Scævinius, "and therefore all men see in Piso his successor. Incontestably he will not want for assistance in establishing himself on the throne. Fenius Rufus is in his favour, and the Annæus family are devoted to him. As for Plautius Lateranus and Tullius Senecio, they would lay down their lives on his behalf, as also would Natalis, Subrius Flavius, Sulpicius Asper, Afranius Quinctianus and Vestinus."

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"The latter would be of little use to him," remarked Petronius. "Vestinus is afraid of his own shadow."

"True, he is nervous on the subject of dreams and phantoms; but he is also a brave man who might well be created a Consul. Nor ought the fact that he secretly disapproves of this persecution of the Christians to be disagreeable to you, seeing that you are interested in having an end put to such atrocities."

"Any interest that I may have in the matter is confined to Vinicius, for whose sake I should be glad to save a certain maiden; but since I am in disgrace at Court, I am not likely to achieve my desire."

"What? Do you not perceive that Cæsar is again trying to make terms with you? He has need of you for his expedition to Achæa."

"Lucan could take my place."

"Ahenobarbus detests him, and has practically decided upon his death. As usual, all that Nero lacks is a pretext. Lucan fully understands that he must hasten."

"By Castor, but that may be true. For myself, I could find a very simple means of regaining the Imperial favour."

"What means?"

"That of repeating to Ahenobarbus all that you have just said."

"But I have said nothing whatever!" cried Scævius anxiously.

Petronius laid his hand upon the Senator's shoulder.

"No," he remarked. "You have merely expressed an opinion that Cæsar is mad; you have merely named Piso as his probable successor; and you have merely added that 'Lucan fully understands that he must hasten.' Hasten to do what?"

Their eyes met.

"You will not repeat what I have said?" said Scævius again.

"By the hips of Cypris, do you not *yet* know me? No, I shall *not* repeat your words, for I did not hear them, nor did I wish to do so. Life is too short to take note of everything that happens to cross one's path. All I ask is that you shall at once pay Tigellinus a visit, and talk to him for just such a space of time as you have devoted to myself. What you may talk of during that visit I care not."

"But why should I do this?"

"Why? For the following reason. If, at any moment, Tigellinus should come to me and say, 'Scævius has been to see you,' it is necessary that I should be able to reply, 'Yes; and he has been to see you too.'"

Scævius broke his ivory cane in half, crying:

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"May the breaking of this cane avert the Furies! Yes, I *will* pay Tigellinus a visit, and also Nerva, who is giving a banquet to-night. Shall you yourself be there? In any case we shall meet in two days' time, at the amphitheatre, on the occasion of the concluding spectacle of Christians. Until then farewell."

"Yes, in two days' time," repeated Petronius to himself after Scaevinus' departure. "Well, there is not a moment to be lost. Ahenobarbus has need of my company in Achæa, so perhaps he is going to make the first advance."

Upon that Petronius decided to employ an extreme measure.

At Nerva's banquet Cæsar himself ordered that his late favourite should be his *vis-à-vis* at table; and when they had taken their seats he remarked:

"I feel as though I had never lived in Rome at all—as though Greece must have been my birthplace."

"At all events it is in Greece that you will reap yet added glory," replied Petronius.

"Indeed, I hope so, and that Apollo will evince no jealousy. Should I garner fresh laurels, I will offer him a hecatomb that will be for ever remembered."

Upon this Scaevinus cited Horace's lines:

"Sic te diva potens Cypri,
Sic fratres Helenæ, lucida sidera,
Ventorumque regat Pater."¹

"The ship is waiting for me at Neapolis," said Nero, "and I must depart—yes, depart to-morrow."

Petronius looked him full in the eyes.

"Should you do so, my lord," he inquired, "may I first offer you a nuptial banquet to which I should like specially to invite you?"

"A *nuptial* banquet? On the occasion of whose nuptials?"

"On the occasion of those of Vinicius and the Lygian King's daughter. True, at this moment the latter is in prison; but in her capacity of a hostage she cannot lawfully be detained a prisoner. Moreover, you yourself have sanctioned the marriage; and inasmuch as your decrees resemble those of Zeus in that they allow of no appeal, I know that you will set her at liberty, in order that I may hand her over to her betrothed."

The cool indifference and assurance of Petronius' words

¹ "May the potent goddess of Cyprus,
And Helen's brethren, the twinkling stars,
And the Father of the Winds go with you!"

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dumfounded Nero, who all his life had experienced a difficulty in answering a direct question.

"Yes, I know," at length he replied with a look of confusion. "It was of her I was thinking, as well as of the giant who strangled Croto."

"Then both are reprieved," said Petronius calmly.

Here Tigellinus came to his master's assistance.

"It is by the will of Cæsar that the maiden is in prison," said he; "and you yourself, Petronius, have just said that the decrees of Cæsar allow of no appeal."

All present knew the history of Vinicius and Lygia, but nothing was said, for all were curious to see the issue of the conflict.

"If she is in prison," said Petronius distinctly, "it is owing to your ignorance of the law of nations, and *against* the will of Cæsar. Fool though you are, Tigellinus, you will scarcely be fool enough to tell me that it was she who fired Rome. Even were you to do so, Cæsar would not believe you."

By this time Nero had recovered his presence of mind, and had begun to blink his short-sighted eyes with a sinister expression.

"Petronius is right," he remarked.

Tigellinus stared at him in amazement.

"Yes, Petronius is right," repeated Nero. "To-morrow the prison gates shall be opened to the pair; and of the nuptial ceremony we will speak again on the following day, in the amphitheatre."

"Again I have lost!" thought Petronius.

So convinced did he feel that Lygia's hour was come that on the morrow he dispatched a trusty freedman to the superintendent of the spoliarium, with orders to treat with that functionary for the purchase of the corpse, in order that, after the execution, the remains might be sent to Vinicius, if the latter should desire to have them.

XXV

It was in Nero's day that Rome first conceived a taste for evening performances in circuses and amphitheatres; and especially was this taste fostered by the Augustans, in that such performances were usually a prelude to a banquet and other orgies which lasted far into the night. Sated though the populace was with blood, the news that the end of the games was approaching, and that the last of the Christians were to die at an evening spectacle, brought a vast crowd

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to witness the entertainment. In particular, the Augustans, to a man, attended, since they guessed that Cæsar's intention was to divert himself with the contemplation of Vinicius' agony; and though Tigellinus had said nothing as to the species of punishment reserved for the young tribune's betrothed, the very silence of the Prefect had served to whet the general curiosity. Those who, in former days, had seen Lygia at Plautius' house had marvellous tales to relate concerning her beauty; while some there were whose exclusive pre-occupation it was to wager whether or no she would actually appear in the arena—the cause of their doubt being the fact that the guests at Nerva's banquet had given differing versions of Nero's reply to Petronius. Some persons even alleged that Nero would restore her, or had already restored her, to her lover, and cited as their reason for so supposing the circumstance that she was a hostage, and therefore possessed, under the law of nations, of a right to worship what deity she pleased, and in no case to be punished for so doing.

Indeed, upon the spectators also had this uncertainty, this curiosity, this expectation taken a hold. Cæsar arrived later than had been his wont. With him, in addition to Tigellinus and Vatinius, came Cassius—a centurion of prodigious stature and enormous strength. Also, the Prætorians were present in greater numbers than usual, and were commanded, not by a centurion, but by the tribune Subrius Flavus, who was known to all for his blind attachment to the Imperial person. Clearly Cæsar wished, should any untoward incident arise, to be safeguarded against any desperate attempt on the part of Vinicius. The public curiosity rose to fever pitch, and every eye kept turning greedily to the seat occupied by the unfortunate tribune. His face was deadly pale, and on his forehead there were standing great drops of sweat.

Petronius, still uncertain as to what was about to happen, had done no more than ask his nephew if he was ready for the ordeal, and if he intended to be present at the spectacle. To both questions Vinicius had returned an answer in the affirmative, but a shudder had shaken him from head to foot, since he suspected that Petronius had reason for his inquiries. For a long time past the young man had been half-alive. Already he had entered the portals of death, as well as accepted the fact that Lygia was about to do the same, since for both the act of death would mean at once deliverance and re-union. This alone had enabled him to contemplate the fatal moment with calmness. But now the blow had fallen—now, under his very eyes, there was to take place the martyrdom of the being who was

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dearer to him than life itself! Once more the despair which he had conquered began to rage in his soul; once more the desire to rescue Lygia at all costs took possession of him. Since dawn he had been trying to obtain admittance to the arena dungeons, in order to ascertain if she were really there; but Prætorians had been on guard at every entrance, and they had been armed with such strict orders that even those of their number who knew him had not dared to yield either to his prayers or to his gold. Indeed, he felt as though the uncertainty would kill him even before he came to behold the spectacle itself. Yet still at the bottom of his heart there lurked a last remnant of hope. Perhaps Lygia was *not* among the number of the condemned? Perhaps all his terrors were in vain? At intervals he would grapple this idea to his soul with his whole imagination. Yet when, on being repulsed from the gate of the cuniculum, he returned to his seat in the amphitheatre, and realised from the curious glances directed at him from every quarter that even the most frightful suppositions were admissible—well, then there was nothing left for him to do but to implore Christ with passionate, even menacing, vehemence. “Thou, and only Thou, canst save her!” he kept repeating as he twisted his hands convulsively. “Thou, and only Thou, hast the power!” Never had he foreseen how unspeakably terrible the moment would be. He felt that, should he be forced to witness Lygia’s agony, his love for Christ would turn to hatred, and his faith to despair. Yet still he dreaded to offend the Christ whom he was imploring; wherefore he did not pray that Lygia might be spared, but only that she might die before she had been dragged into the arena. From the fathomless depths of his pain there rose to Heaven, again and yet again, the cry: “Do not refuse me that! Nothing do I ask but that! O Christ, grant it me, and I will love Thee even a thousand times more than I have hitherto done!” In short, his thoughts were all at sea, and he had quite lost his desire for blood and vengeance. True, at times he felt a yearning to rush upon Cæsar, and to strangle him where he sat; but the next moment he would remember that that yearning was contrary to Christ’s wishes and commandments. Next, a few rays of hope would shoot through his brain—he would begin to believe that all these things which were so terrifying his soul would be averted by an omnipotent and merciful hand; but almost at once that optimistic feeling would give place to one of boundless desolation, as though He who by a word could have overthrown the building and rescued Lygia had abandoned her, even though she adored Him with the whole strength of her pure spirit.

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He kept thinking of the fact that she was there, in that dark cuniculum—a defenceless prey to the bestiality of the gaolers, the while, sad and weak and at her last gasp, she awaited death in that foul arena, without even knowing what punishment had been invented for her. At length, like a man who, rolling towards the edge of a precipice, clutches at anything which may break his fall, Vinicius fastened upon the idea that by faith he still could save her. Faith was all that remained to him: and had not Peter said that faith could shake the world to its foundations?

Absorbed in this hope, he put away all doubt from his mind, and threw his whole being into the words, "I have faith." Surely a miracle would come of them.

Yet, even as excessive tension bursts a cord, so the efforts put forth by Vinicius broke his spirit. A deathlike pallor overspread his countenance; gradually a cold torpor crept through his body. Under the belief that his prayer had been granted, he imagined himself to be at the point of death. Also, it seemed to him that Lygia must be already dead, and that Christ was taking them to Himself. Suddenly the arena, the gleam of the countless white togas, the light of thousands upon thousands of lanterns and torches alike vanished from before his eyes.

Yet the fainting fit was of short duration, for soon the impatient shouts of the crowd recalled him to himself.

"You are ill," whispered Petronius in his ear. "Have yourself taken home." And, without paying further attention to what Cæsar was saying, he rose to support the young tribune towards the entrance. Pity was surging in his heart, and he felt infuriated to see Nero, with his emerald at his eye, calmly watching Vinicius' agony—doubtless in order, at some future date, to describe it in mock-pathetic stanzas, and so to win applause from the mob!

Vinicius shook his head. He might die in that amphitheatre, but he would never leave it.

Just at that moment the Prefect threw down upon the sand a red scarf; and as he did so the gate facing the Imperial balcony grated upon its hinges, and from the dark opening behind it there emerged into the brilliantly lighted arena the figure of the Lygian, Ursus. At first he blinked his eyelids, as though dazzled; then he advanced to the centre of the circle, and looked around him to discern what it was he had to meet. The Augustans and most of the populace knew that this was the man who had strangled Croto; and from tier to tier the murmurs rose. Gladiators of exceptional physique were not lacking in Rome, but never had the eyes of the citizens seen a giant like this. Senators, Vestals, Cæsar, Augustans, and the mob alike gazed with

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the admiration of connoisseurs at those formidable thighs, at that breast which resembled a pair of shields draw together, and at those Herculean arms.

He remained perfectly motionless in the centre of the arena—looking, as he stood there in his nudity, like a colossus of granite which had in its barbaric countenance a tinge of sadness mingled with vigilance. At length, perceiving the arena to be empty, he turned his blue, childlike eyes in turn upon the spectators, upon Cæsar, and upon the gratings of the cuniculi whence he expected executioners to issue.

At the moment of entering the arena his heart had for a second quivered with the hope that he was about to die upon the cross; but, on perceiving neither cross nor socket-hole, he conceived that he had been adjudged unworthy of such a favour, and was to meet his end in some other fashion—probably under the fangs of wild beasts. He was unarmed, and had resolved to die patiently, even as the Lamb would have had him do; but since he wished to address one more prayer to the Redeemer, he knelt down, joined his hands together, and raised his eyes to the stars which were glittering through the aperture in the velarium.

This posture displeased the mob, which had grown tired of seeing human beings die like sheep. If the giant refused to defend himself the spectacle would prove a fiasco. Here and there a whistle shrilled forth, while other voices called loudly for the mastigophori and their scourges; but gradually silence fell, since no one knew what was able to face the giant, nor whether at the decisive moment he would decline to fight.

The mob had not long to wait. Suddenly there resounded a deafening clatter of iron bars, and from out of the grating opposite to the Imperial balcony there rushed, amid the yells of the beast-keepers, one of the monstrous aurochs of Germany, with, bound upon its head, a naked woman.

"Lygia, Lygia!" shouted Vinicius as, seizing his hair in both hands, he writhed like a man who feels the point of a spear penetrating his entrails. Again and again he gasped in a hoarse, inhuman voice:

"I have faith! I have faith! O Christ, work a miracle!"

Indeed, he did not feel Petronius throw a toga over his head as he uttered the words. He only felt that either death or agony had darkened all before his eyes. He could look at nothing, he could see nothing when he did so. The sensation of this wrapped him in a sort of horrible darkness, with no idea left to him but to keep his lips deliciously repeating:

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"I have faith! I have faith! I have faith!"

The amphitheatre had suddenly become absolutely still. Only the Augustans had risen *en masse* in their places. In the arena there was passing an unprecedented scene. At the sight of his princess bound upon the horns of the savage bull, the Lygian, hitherto humble and prepared for death, had sprung forward like a man scorched with living fire, and, with back bent, was creeping, zigzag fashion, towards the maddened beast.

Then from every throat there issued a short, a tremulous cry of amazement, followed by a profound silence. For with a single bound the Lygian had reached the beast and gripped its horns!

"Look!" cried Petronius as he snatched away the toga from Vinicius' head. The other rose, lifted a face of a deadly whiteness, and stared with wild, fixed eyes at the arena. Not a man present could breathe. A fly might have been heard winging its way through the arena. Never since Rome had been Rome had such a sight been seen.

The man was holding the beast by the horns. Up to the ankles his feet were planted in the sand; his back was bent like the arch of a drawn bow; his head had disappeared between his shoulders; the muscles of his arms had emerged in such relief that the skin seemed as though it must crack under the strain of their enlargement. Yet he had stopped the bull full in its career, and now was fixed with it in such absolute immobility that the spectators saw before them, as it were, a statuesque representation of the feats of Theseus or of Hercules. Nevertheless this apparent immobility was the result of the unseen tension of two furious forces. The aurochs also had its feet planted in the sand, while the dark, shaggy bulk of its body had curled together like a gigantic ball. Which of the two adversaries would first become exhausted, which of the two adversaries would first fall—that, for the entranced spectators of the struggle, meant, at that moment, more than their own fortunes, more than the fate of Rome, more than the world-wide dominion of the Roman Empire. This Lygian had suddenly become a demi-god. Cæsar himself had risen to his feet to view the spectacle, which Tigellinus, knowing the man's strength, had purposely organised with the ironical words, "Let the conqueror of Croto overthrow the bull that *we* will loose against him!"

And now every one was contemplating with stupefaction the picture presented—incapable of believing that it was real. Some people had raised their arms, and were standing fixed in that posture; others had their foreheads running with sweat, as though it was they themselves who were

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struggling with the bull. In all that vast circle there was to be heard only the singing sound of the lantern-flames and the cracking of brackets under their weight of torches. Speech had died on every lip, and hearts were beating as though they would burst the breasts which contained them. For every spectator the struggle seemed to be lasting for centuries.

And all this while the man and the beast remained fixed in their frightful effort—remained chained, as it were, to the ground.

Suddenly a deep, groaning bellow mounted from the arena. Every throat let forth a shout. Then again there was absolute silence. Men believed themselves to be dreaming. *For under the iron arms of the barbarian the monstrous head of the aurochs was slowly turning round!*

The Lygian's face, neck, and arms had become purple, and the arch of his back had bent yet more. It was clear that he was rallying the remainder of his superhuman strength, and that soon the latter would be exhausted.

Always growing more and more stifled and hoarse and painful, the aurochs' bellowing mingled with the strident breathing of the Lygian. Gradually the animal's head was turning more and more to one side; until suddenly there escaped from its gullet a huge slobbering tongue. An instant later the ears of the spectators who were nearest to the arena caught the dull sound of bones breaking. Then, with its withers twisted under it, the beast collapsed in a heap—dead!

In a twinkling the giant had released the horns, and taken the girl into his arms. Then he fell to panting vehemently. His face was pale, his hair was plastered with sweat, and his shoulders and arms were dripping. For a moment or two he stood motionless, as though dazed; then he raised his eyes, and looked at the spectators.

The audience had gone mad. The walls of the immense building were quivering with the clamour of tens of thousands of throats. The spectators on the upper tiers had left their places, flowed downwards towards the arena, and crammed themselves into the passage-ways, the better to view the Hercules. From every quarter came voices demanding his pardon—passionate, insistent voices which soon combined into an immense outcry. To a mob which, above all things, admired physical strength the giant had become an idol—he had become the first personage in Rome.

For his own part, he understood that the people were demanding for him his life and liberty; but it was not of those boons that he was thinking. For a moment or two he cast his eyes around him; then he approached the

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Imperial balcony—balancing the form of the young girl in his outstretched arms as he raised suppliant eyes which said: "It is *her* pardon that I ask for; it is *she* who must be saved; it is for *her* that I have done this."

At once the spectators divined his desire. At the sight of the unconscious maiden, who, beside the huge body of the Lygian, looked like a tiny child, emotion seized upon knights, Senators, and the mob alike. Her frail figure, her unconscious condition, the frightful danger from which the giant had just rescued her, and, finally, her beauty and the devotion of the Lygian all combined to touch the popular heart. Some even thought that it was a father demanding pardon for his daughter, and pity flamed up in them the more. The people had had enough of blood, of death, of torture. With voices strangled with sobs they demanded that Lygia and Ursus should be forgiven.

Meanwhile Ursus continued to parade the arena with the young girl balanced in his arms, and to implore both with eyes and gesture that Lygia's life should be preserved to her. Suddenly Vinicius leapt from his seat, crossed the partition-wall of the tier, and, rushing up to Lygia, covered with his toga the naked body of his betrothed. Then he tore open his tunic at the breast, and, exposing to view the scars which he had received in Armenia, extended his arms towards the people.

Upon that the popular frenzy surpassed anything that the amphitheatre had ever witnessed. The entire populace fell to stamping its feet and shouting. Voices which had hitherto been suppliant now became menacing, and thousands of spectators turned towards Cæsar, and shook their fists at him, with the light of fury gleaming in their eyes.

Nero prevaricated; for although he felt no real hatred of Vinicius, and cared not greatly whether Lygia lived or died, he would have preferred to see the young girl disembowelled by the bull's horns, or torn in pieces by the fangs of wild beasts. His cruelty, added to his depraved imagination, found a voluptuous pleasure in such spectacles. Yet here was the mob seeking to deprive him of that pleasure! Fury showed itself on his fat-disfigured features, since, apart from anything else, his conceit forbade him to submit to the popular will, even though his native cowardice urged him also not to oppose it.

So he set himself to scan those around him, in the hope that at least among the Augustans he would see a thumb pointing downwards, in token of death. But Petronius extended his hand with the thumb upwards, and, with a slight nod of defiance, looked Cæsar straight in the eyes,

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while the superstitious Vestinus, who, though prone to emotion, was much afraid of phantoms, but not at all of men, also gave the sign of pardon. Thereafter the same thing was done by many others; on seeing which, Cæsar removed the emerald from his eye with an expression of anger and contempt. Tigellinus, however, who wished at all costs to win a victory over Petronius, leant over his master and whispered:

"Do not yield, my lord. We have behind us the Prætorians."

Nero turned towards the spot where, at the head of his guard, there was standing the ferocious Subrius Flavus—a man who hitherto had been devoted to him, body and soul. And as Nero looked he saw an unwonted sight. The forbidding face of the old tribune was bathed in tears, and with his raised hand he was making the sign of the cross!

Meanwhile rage had taken complete possession of the multitude. Under the incessant stamping of feet a cloud of dust had wrapped the amphitheatre in an obscurity whence came shouts of "Ahenobarbus!" and imprecations upon "the matricide and the incendiary." Nero took alarm at this. In the Circus the people were absolute masters. True, his predecessors, more especially Caligula, had more than once taken it upon themselves to oppose the popular will, and so to risk certain disorder and probable rioting; but Nero was less favourably situated. In the first place, as a comedian and a vocalist, he had need of the favour of the people; in the second place, he wished, in his struggle with the Senate and the patricians, to have the people on his side; and, finally, since the burning of Rome he had been forced to conciliate the mob by every means in his power, and to divert its anger in the direction of the Christians. Consequently he knew that it would be dangerous to show further resistance, since sedition born in the Circus might soon involve the whole city, and produce incalculable consequences.

So, after glancing at Subrius Flavus, at the centurion Scævinius, and at the soldiers in general, and seeing everywhere only frowns, agitated features, and angry looks at himself, he gave the sign of pardon.

From top to bottom of the amphitheatre there arose a storm of applause. The people assured the lives of the condemned, and from that moment onwards the latter were under the people's protection, and no one, not even Cæsar, might dare to persecute them further.

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XXVI

FOUR Bithynian slaves carried Lygia carefully towards Petronius' villa. Vinicius and Ursus, as they walked beside the litter, spoke not a word, for, after the emotions of the day, neither of them had the strength left to converse. Vinicius was still in a half-dazed condition. He kept telling himself that Lygia was safe, that neither prison nor death in the arena any longer menaced her, that their misfortunes had come to an end, and that he was taking her home, never again to be separated from her side. It all seemed to him the dawn of a new life rather than reality. From time to time he would lean over the open litter, in order to gaze, by the light of the moon, at the dear face which seemed asleep, and to murmur once more to himself:

"It is she! Christ has saved her!"

He remembered now that in the spoliarium whither he and Ursus had carried Lygia they had found a physician, who had assured them that she was still alive, and that she would live; and at the thought his breast swelled with such impetuous joy that he began to turn faint, and, unable to walk unsupported, to feel obliged to lean upon Ursus' arm. As for Ursus himself, he kept glancing at the star-bespangled heavens, and sending up prayers.

Thus they made their way swiftly among newly-built houses the whiteness of which gleamed the whiter under the rays of the moon. The city was deserted. Only here and there were a few groups of ivy-garlanded persons singing and dancing before their porticoes, and celebrating, to the sound of the flute, the holiday period which was to end with the games. Just before Petronius' villa was reached Ursus ceased praying, and said in a low voice, as though he feared to awake Lygia:

"My lord, it was the Redeemer who saved her from death. When I caught sight of her on the horns of the aurochs a voice in me cried, 'Defend her!' And beyond a doubt that voice was the voice of the Lamb. Prison had impaired my strength, but for the moment He restored it to me. He too it was who inspired the bloodthirsty mob with the idea of interceding for us. May His will be done!"

"Yes, glorified be the name of the Saviour!" replied Vinicius.

More he could not say, for great sobs were choking his bosom. He felt an irresistible yearning to throw himself upon the ground, and, prone there before the Saviour,

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to thank Him for the miracle which His mercy had accomplished.

Soon, however, they reached the villa, and were met by the whole body of servants, who had been warned beforehand by a slave. Already at Antium the majority of Petronius' domestic staff had been converted to Christianity by Paul of Tarsus; wherefore Vinicius' sad story was well known to them, and they were overjoyed to see the victims who had been rescued from Nero's cruelty. That joy increased the more when Theocles the physician gave it as his opinion that Lygia had suffered no serious injury—that, though prison life had weakened her strength, the latter would soon return.

She recovered consciousness the same night, and, on waking in a splendid cubiculum that was lighted with Corinthian lamps and perfumed with verbenæ, could not at first understand where she was, nor what had happened, since her memory carried her only up to the moment when the executioners had bound her to the horns of the shackled aurochs. Indeed, on perceiving Vinicius' face bending over her in the tender lamp-light, she imagined that she was no longer in this world below—the disordered state of her ideas leading her to accept it as a natural circumstance that he and she had halted somewhere on their way to Heaven, in order that she might recover a little from her weakness and her fatigue. No longer conscious of any pain, she smiled at Vinicius, and tried to ask him a question; but her lips succeeded only in uttering an almost inarticulate murmur, in which he could distinguish nothing but his name.

Kneeling down beside her, he laid a hand upon her beloved forehead, and said:

“Christ has saved you, and has restored you to me.”

Lygia's lips moved again in an indistinct murmur, her eyelids closed, and she sank back into the profound slumber which Theocles had expected as the probable and most favourable sign. Vinicius remained beside her, absorbed in prayer, with his whole soul flooded with fathomless adoration. Then he too lost consciousness. Several times Theocles entered the cubiculum; several times, also, Eunice raised the curtain before the door, and cautiously inserted therein her golden head. At length the cranes which were kept in the garden began to call aloud as day-break drew near. Still Vinicius remained prostrate at the feet of Christ—seeing nothing, hearing nothing, but with his whole heart purged in a flame of ecstasy. For already, though on earth, he had ascended to Heaven!

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XXVII

AFTER Lygia's release from the arena, Petronius, unwilling to irritate Cæsar further, accompanied the latter and the other Augustans to the palace. He wished to hear what might be said there, as also to make sure that Tigellinus would not hatch some new scheme against Lygia. Although, with Ursus, she had now passed under the protective care of the people, Petronius knew the Prefect of the Prætorian Guard well enough to feel certain that the hatred which that omnipotent functionary had vowed against the maiden would lead him, in default of a more direct method, to try and get even with Vinicius.

Nero was in a very captious mood, for the spectacle had ended in a very different fashion from what he had desired. At first he would not deign to glance at Petronius; but the latter, in no wise disconcerted, approached him with his usual graceful air as "Arbiter of the Elegances," and said:

"An idea has just occurred to me, my lord. Do you write a poem on the subject of a maiden whom the will of the Master of the World has just delivered from the horns of a savage aurochs in order to restore her to her lover. The Greeks have tender hearts, and would, I feel sure, be delighted with such a poem."

Sure enough, the idea pleased Cæsar, and doubly so—both as a novel theme, and as a fresh occasion for glorifying his own magnanimity. So he looked at Petronius for a moment or two, and then replied:

"It may be that you are right. But would it be fitting for me to sing of my own kindness of heart?"

"You need state no names. All the city knows what has taken place, and the news is spreading thence over the entire universe."

"And you feel sure that the poem would find favour in Achæa?"

"By Pollux, assuredly!" cried Petronius.

So he departed satisfied. In his mind there remained not a doubt but that Nero, whose whole life was spent in making reality conform to the framework of his literary conceptions, would leap at this chance of spoiling a splendid literary motif—and so tie, by the act, the hands of Tigellinus.

Meanwhile he still held to his idea of getting Lygia and his nephew removed out of harm's way, as soon as ever the health of the former would permit of such a step being taken. Next day he said to Vinicius:

"Depart at once for Sicily with Lygia. Thanks to a

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certain incident, no danger now menaces you from Cæsar, but Tigellinus is capable of resorting even to poison, so great is his hatred of me, if not of yourself."

Vinicius smiled, and replied:

"Lygia was bound to the horns of an aurochs; yet Christ saved her."

"Then offer to Christ a whole hecatomb if you wish," retorted Petronius, slightly nettled: "only, *do* not ask your deity to save her a second time. Remember how Æolus received Ulysses when the latter came to beg a new cargo of favourable winds. The gods do not love having to do things twice."

"As soon as ever Christ has restored to her her health I intend to return her to the care of Pomponia Græcina."

"And you will be acting the more wisely in that Pomponia Græcina is ill. A relative of the Aulus family—one Austitius—has just been to tell me of the good lady's indisposition. During your absence things may happen here which will cause you to become forgotten. In these days folk are happiest who have no notice taken of them. May Fortuna prosper you, and reserve for you a place in the sunshine in the winter time, and a place in the shade during the season when the sun is hot!"

Then, leaving Vinicius to his happiness, Petronius departed to consult Theocles as to Lygia's health. By this time she was out of danger, and a couple of days later saw her removed into the garden which surrounded the villa. There she would lie for hours together, while Vinicius decked her litter with anemones and irises in memory of the Auluses' atrium. Sometimes, too, in the shadow of the trees, they would sit hand in hand, and talk to one another of their late sorrows and fears. Cæsar might rage as he liked in Rome, and fill the world with terror; but over the heads of the lovers there was suspended a protection a hundred times more formidable than he—a protection which bade them fear neither his fury nor his madness, since he had ceased to hold over them the right of life and of death. Once, at the hour of sunset, they heard the roarings of wild beasts in distant vivaria; and though formerly those voices had chilled Vinicius with fear, as being presages of death, the lovers now merely looked at one another, and then raised their eyes towards the evening glow. Sometimes, too, Lygia, who was still weak and unable to walk alone, would go to sleep in the stillness of the garden, and Vinicius would watch over her; and as he gazed at her face in repose he would find himself thinking that this was not the same Lygia whom he had seen at the Auluses' house, since prison life and fever had in part extinguished her beauty. When

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living with the Auluses and, later, in Miriam's abode, she had been as marvellously beautiful as a statue, and as miraculously fair as a flower; but now her face seemed almost transparent, her hands were wasted, her figure had altered with fever, her lips had turned pale, and her eyes looked less blue. Beside her the golden-headed Eunice appeared, when she brought her flowers or covered her feet over with precious rugs, like the goddess of Cyprus. In vain did the æsthetic Petronius strive to find in the Lygian maiden her bygone charms, and tell himself, at times, with a shrug of the shoulders, that this phantom returned from the Elysian Fields had not been worth the pain, the tortures, the agony which had nearly killed Vinicius. Yet the latter loved her the more, for now he loved her soul as well as her body. Whenever watching over her sleep, he felt as though he were watching over the whole world.

XXVIII

THE news of Lygia's marvellous deliverance spread rapidly among the survivors of the Christian community, and the faithful flocked to greet her—the first of these visitors being Nazarus and the aged Miriam, in whose house the Apostle Peter was still lying concealed. All listened with rapture to Ursus' story of the voice which had arisen in his soul, and bidden him join battle with the aurochs; and his hearers regained their hiding-places with renewed hope that Christ would not suffer them to be utterly exterminated before He Himself arrived on the dread Day of Judgment. This hope strengthened their hearts, although the persecutions had not yet ceased. True, the people no longer believed that the Christians had fired Rome; yet the edict which had declared them enemies of the human race and of the Empire still remained in force.

For a long time past the Apostle Peter had not dared to visit Petronius' house; but one evening Nazarus announced that he was on his way thither. Lygia (who could now walk a little) and Vinicius went to meet him, and threw themselves at his feet; nor was his joy at meeting them again the less in that, of the flock which Christ had confided to his care, so few sheep remained. Vinicius exclaimed as he met him, "Master, it is thanks to you that the Redeemer has restored her to me!" and the Apostle replied, "He has restored her to you because of your faith, and also because the many lips which have confessed His name have not been made dumb for ever."

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Both Lygia and Vinicius noticed that Peter's hair had greatly whitened, that his form was bent, and that his features were stamped with an expression of sorrow and suffering, as though he had gone through every torture and every martyrdom that had been inflicted. Vinicius, who reckoned soon to be removing Lygia to Neapolis, that they might there rejoin Pomponia Græcina and proceed together to Sicily, besought Peter to accompany them.

The Apostle laid his hand upon the young tribune's head, and replied:

"My labours are drawing to a close, but only in the mansions of the Lord shall I find rest and a welcome."

Then, addressing Lygia also, he added:

"Do you both remember me, for I have loved you as a father loves his children; and whatsoever you may do in this life, do it always in the name of the Lord."

And, raising his trembling hands over their heads, Peter blessed them.

A few days later Petronius brought from the Palatine some alarming news. It had been discovered that one of Cæsar's freedmen was a Christian, and upon him there had been found letters from Saints Peter, Paul, James, Jude, and John. Now, Tigellinus had been under the impression that Peter had perished, as had so many thousands of other Christians; yet it had just been learnt that both Peter and the other superior of the new religion were not only alive, but present in Rome itself! Consequently Tigellinus had decided to capture them at all costs, since with them there would disappear the last remnants of the hated sect; to which end detachments of Prætorians had been dispatched to search every house in the Trans-Tiberian quarter.

At once Vinicius resolved to go and warn the Apostle. With Ursus, he repaired the same evening to Miriam's cottage, where the pair found Peter surrounded by a handful of the faithful, including Timothy and Linus. Nazarus lost no time in conducting all present to the deserted quarries which lay at a distance of a few hundred paces from the Janiculine Gate. Ursus carried Linus, whose bones had been broken by the torturers.

It was not until they had reached the catacombs that they felt themselves safe, or could take counsel as to the best means of saving the Apostle, whose life they considered to be the most precious of all.

"Master," at length said Vinicius, "suffer yourself to be guided, at dawn, to the Alban Hills. There we will rejoin you, and take you with us to Antium, where there is a ship in waiting to convey us to Neapolis, and thence to Sicily. Blessed will be the day and the hour when you shall

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cross the threshold of my house, and take a seat by my hearth!"

The others also pressed the Apostle to adopt this scheme. "We pray you take refuge," they said. "You cannot remain in Rome, since you must preserve the faith alive, lest it perish both with us and with you. Hearken unto us, we beseech you! Hearken unto us as our own father!"

Peter replied:

"My children, which of us knows the day when the Lord will take him from this world?"

Yet he did not say that he would leave Rome, even though for a long time past there had been creeping upon his soul a feeling of uncertainty, and even of terror. His flock had been dispersed, his work annulled, and the Church, which, before the burning of the city, had been developing like a splendid tree, reduced to dust by the might of the Beast. The seed had brought forth an abundant harvest, but the spirit of evil had trampled the crop under its feet, and the legions of Heaven had not come to the assistance of those who were perishing. No! Here was Nero reigning in glory—more terrible and more powerful than ever, and the master of every sea and every continent!

Often before had the Apostle, when alone, stretched hands to Heaven, crying: "O Lord, what am I to do? How can I remain here? How can I, a weak old man, wrestle with the dread force of evil which Thou hast permitted to rule and to conquer?" Thus, in his grief, he would invoke the Almighty, and repeat: "The lambs which Thou gavest me have perished, Thy Church is no more, and desolation and mourning fill the city. What, therefore, dost Thou bid me do? Shall I remain here? Or shall I remove the remnant of Thy flock, to the end that beyond the seas we may again glorify Thy name?" Yet always Peter hesitated, for always he had faith that the living truth would not perish, but prevail. At the same time, there were moments when he conceived that the hour of victory would come only on the day when the Lord should descend to earth in His might; while at other moments he believed that, were he himself to leave Rome, the faithful would follow him, and he would take them away to the shady forests of Galilee, to the calm mirror of the Lake of Tiberias.

Yet no sooner would he decide to set out than anguish would seize him at the thought of leaving the city where the blood of so many martyrs had stained the earth, and so many lips had, in their agony, testified to the truth. Ought he alone to dash the cup from his lips? And, should

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he do so, what answer would he have to make to the Lord when he heard the words: "*They* died for their faith, but *thou*—thou hast fled!"

Anxious days and nights succeeded one another. The Christians whom the lions had rent asunder, who had been nailed to crosses, who had been burnt in the Gardens of Cæsar, had fallen asleep, after their martyrdom, in the bosom of the Saviour; but he, Peter, could not sleep—he was enduring a martyrdom greater than all the tortures which the executioners had devised. Often, at the moment when dawn was beginning to whiten the roofs, he was once more calling aloud from the bottom of his contrite heart:

"O Lord, why didst Thou command me to come to this place, and to found Thy City in the stronghold of the Beast?"

Never once during the thirty-four years which had elapsed since the death of the Master had the Apostle known repose. With his pilgrim's staff in his hand, he had roamed the world to proclaim the "glad tidings." His whole strength had been spent in work and in travel. And now, when at last, in this city which was the capital of the universe, he had reared a temple to the Master, a single breath from the scorching maw of Fury had burnt that temple to the ground! Now once more he had to begin the struggle anew! And what a struggle it was! On the one hand, Nero, the Senate, the people, the legions which ringed the world about with a girdle of iron, with such power as the human eye had never before beheld: on the other hand, he, so bent with age and weariness that his trembling hands could scarcely lift his pilgrim's staff! Often he would say to himself that it was not for him to compete with Cæsar of Rome—that such a task could be accomplished by none but Christ.

Yet now his friends were pressing him ever closer as again and again they repeated in suppliant tones:

"Hide yourself, Master, and save us from the power of the Beast!"

At length Linus bent before him his torture-racked figure.

"Master," he said, "the Saviour said to you, 'Feed My sheep'; but the sheep are no more, for they are on the point of becoming exterminated. Return you, therefore, to places where you may gather fresh flocks. At Ephesus, at Jerusalem, at Antioch, and at many another city is the Word of God still alive. Why, therefore, remain in Rome? Should you perish, you will but render the triumph of the Beast complete. To John the Almighty has set no term of life, while Paul is a Roman citizen, and may not be smitten

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before he has been judged in accordance with the law; but should the forces of Hell alight upon *you*, our Master, those whose hearts are already quaking within them will say, 'Who, then, is greater than Nero?' You are the rock upon which God has built His Church. Leave us, therefore, to die, but do not suffer Antichrist to triumph over the Vicar of God, nor return before God has laid low the man who has spilt the blood of the innocents."

"Yes, yes!" assented the others. "See how we beseech you with tears!"

Tears bedewed also the face of Peter. He rose, extended his hands over his kneeling disciples, and said:

"Glorified be the name of the Lord! May His will be done!"

XXIX

At dawn next day two dark figures were advancing along the Appian Way towards the plains of the Campania. One of them was Nazarus; the other one was Peter, who was leaving the city and those of his flock whom the city had martyred.

In the east the sky was covering itself over with faint streaks of blue, which, where they lay low on the horizon, merged into a brighter shade of saffron. Slowly the silver of the foliage, the white marble of the villas, and the grey arches of the aqueducts which spanned the plain and trended Romewards emerged from the darkness. By degrees the sky lightened, as though it were absorbing liquid gold; and in proportion as the east grew more rosy, there came into view the Alban Hills—marvellous, lilac-coloured apparitions which seemed to be formed of sheer transparency. On the trembling boughs of the trees the dawn was mirrored in the dewdrops; and as the mist dissolved there came into view the whole expanse of the plain, with its sprinkling of houses, cemeteries, villages, clumps of trees, and whitening columns of temples.

The road was deserted, for the countrymen of the Campania who brought vegetables to the city had not yet started with their wagons. On the stone pavement of which the Way, as far as the Hills, was built, the wooden soles of the two pilgrims' travelling sandals alone made a faint patter.

At length the sun emerged from behind the Hills, and a strange spectacle met the Apostle's eye. It seemed to him that, instead of rising into the sky, the great yellow disc had descended from the Hills' crest, and was following the route of the road!

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Peter stopped, and said:

"Do you see the light which is coming towards us?"

"No," answered Nazarus; "I see nothing."

Peter shaded his eyes with his hand, and presently continued:

"There is a man advancing through the sunlight in our direction."

Yet no sound of footsteps reached their ears. Around them the silence was absolute. All that Nazarus could see was that in the distance the trees were quivering, as though shaken by an invisible hand, and that over the plain the daylight was ever spreading. He looked at the Apostle in astonishment.

"Master, what ails you?" he cried anxiously.

For from Peter's hands the staff had fallen to the ground, his eyes were staring fixedly in front of him, his mouth was half-open, and his face had on it an expression at once of amazement, of joy, and of rapture.

All at once he threw himself upon his knees, stretched out his hands, and murmured:

"Christ! Christ!"

Then he fell forward with his face to the earth, as though he were kissing invisible feet. For a long while not a sound was heard. At length the old man exclaimed in a voice broken with sobs:

"*Quo vadis, Domine?*"

The answer to Peter's question was not heard by Nazarus, but to the Apostle's ears there came the sad, gentle voice of Some One who said:

"Now that thou art abandoning my people, I am going to Rome—there to be crucified a second time."

Still the Apostle remained stretched upon the ground, with his face buried in the dust—a silent, motionless figure. Just when Nazarus was beginning to fear that he must either have fainted or expired he rose, retook his pilgrim's staff into his trembling hands, and, without a word, faced about towards the seven hills of Rome.

Like an echo the younger man repeated the words:

"*Quo vadis, Domine?*"

And the Apostle answered gently:

"*Ad Romam.*"

So to Rome they returned.

Paul, John, Linus, and the rest of the faithful received him with surprise and anxiety, for after his departure the Prætorians had surrounded Miriam's dwelling, and searched it for the Apostle. Yet to all questions Peter only replied with a sort of quiet joy:

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"I have seen the Lord!"

That same evening he repaired to the cemetery at Ostrianum, to preach the word of God, and to baptise those who wished to be bathed in the water of life. Thereafter he repaired thither daily, with, in his train, a throng which grew constantly more numerous. It was as though every tear wrung from every martyr had made new converts—as though every groan uttered in the arena were now being re-echoed from thousands of breasts. Cæsar was swimming in blood, and Rome and the pagan universe at large had gone mad; but those who were weary of crime and frenzy, those who had been trampled under foot, those whose life was a life of misfortune and sacrifice—the oppressed, the afflicted, the disinherited—flocked to hear the wonderful story of the God who, for the love of mankind, suffered Himself to be crucified in order that He might redeem the sins of humanity. And, in finding a God whom they could love, they found what the world had never yet been able to give them—namely, happiness through love.

From that time forth Peter understood that all the legions of Cæsar could never destroy the living truth—that never could it be drowned in tears or in blood, and that the hour of victory had begun. He understood also why the Lord had bidden him return, since already the city of pride, of crime, of debauchery, of supreme power had become the city of Christ—had become the capital which was to rule over both the souls and the bodies of men!

XXX

At length the hour struck for Peter and for Paul. Yet even in prison the holy fisherman was permitted to catch two souls in his Master's net, and to baptise the soldiers Processus and Martinianus, who guarded him in the Mamertine gaol. Then came his martyrdom. Cæsar was absent from Rome, and the death warrant was signed by Helius and Polythetes, two Imperial freedmen to whom Nero had entrusted authority of State signature until such time as he should return.

First of all the venerable Apostle suffered the stripes prescribed by law; and next day he was to be conducted beyond the walls to the Vatican Hill—there to meet the punishment assigned him. The soldiers were amazed at the immensity of the crowd which took up its stand before the prison. Surely the death of a man of the people—above all of a foreigner—was not a matter of much interest?

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Yet the procession which was to set out thence was not to be composed of sightseers, but of devout persons who wished to accompany the Great Apostle to the place of his execution.

At length the prison doors opened, and Peter appeared, escorted by Prætorian Guards. The sun was beginning to set over Ostia, but the day was clear and calm.

Owing to his advanced age, the Apostle was not forced to carry his cross. Indeed, to enable him to walk, he was also relieved of the customary shackles and neck-fork. As soon as his snow-white head appeared sobs rose from every quarter of the waiting crowd of Christians, to all of whom he was plainly visible; but almost as instantly those sobs became checked as the faithful caught sight of his face—for it was a face wholly radiant with joy. Then all understood that this was not a victim going to his death, but a conqueror who was advancing in triumph.

Yes, it was so. The humble, common, usually bent old fisherman had drawn himself to his full height, until he dominated even the soldiers. Never before in his bearing had there been seen such majesty. His progress resembled, rather, that of a monarch surrounded by his people and his retinue. Here and there a voice exclaimed, "Peter is setting out to meet the Lord!" All had forgotten that awaiting the Apostle there were torture and death. Solemn and absorbed, the onlookers felt that never since the tragedy on Golgotha had such an event occurred. Just as that other tragedy had redeemed the universe, so was the coming tragedy about to redeem Rome. In profound silence they advanced; and as they did so people halted in amazement at the sight of the old man; whereupon the faithful would lay their hands upon those people's shoulders, and say:

"Yes, look you well; for to his death there is going a just man who knew Christ, and has preached love unto all the world."

Of clamour and street cries there were none. The procession proceeded on its way amid the gleaming whiteness of temples and newly built mansions, while, above, there hung the deep blue of a cloudless sky. Not a word was spoken; only at intervals was there to be heard the clink of iron or the murmur of a prayer. Always the face of Peter seemed to radiate a growing joy; for the number of his converts was so great that his eye was powerless to embrace them all. Yes, he had accomplished his work; the truth which all his life he had preached had become a tide which nothing could submerge or arrest. Raising his eyes to heaven, he cried within himself: "O Lord, Thou

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didst bid me conquer this city which doth rule the world, and I have conquered it! Thou didst bid me found there Thy capital, and I have founded it! Now, O Lord, it is *Thy* city, and unto Thee am I coming, for my work is fulfilled!" As he passed the temples he said to them, "Soon will you be temples of Christ," and as he viewed the multitude of onlookers he prophesied, "One day will your children be servants of Christ." Thus did he go his way—conscious of his victory, conscious of his worthiness, conscious of his power, conscious of his greatness, conscious of the fact that he had been comforted and was at peace. *Via* the Pontus Triumphalis the soldiers—involuntary confirmers of his triumph—led him in the direction of the Naumachia and the Circus; and thus the faithful of the Trans-Tiberian quarter were enabled to join the procession, until the multitude had become so great that, at length divining that he had in his charge a high priest surrounded by his flock, the centurion began to feel uneasy as to the sufficiency of the military escort. Yet not a single cry of indignation or fury came from the crowd. Every face was stamped with a sense of the greatness of the occasion—was charged with solemnity and reverence. Many of the faithful remembered that, when the Saviour died, the earth quaked with fear, and the dead came out of their graves; and they thought that now also there would appear signs on earth and in the heavens by which the death of the Apostle should be marked for ever. Others said to themselves, "Peradventure the Lord will choose St. Peter's Day to descend from Heaven and judge the world": and, filled with that belief, they commended themselves to the mercy of Christ.

Yet all around was calm and peaceful; the seven hills of Rome seemed to be basking and slumbering in the bright sunshine. At length the procession halted between the Circus and the Vatican Hill. Some of the soldiers began to dig a hole in the ground, while others, after setting down the cross, stood by with hammers in their hands until the preparations should be complete. Around, in the same absorbed silence as hitherto, there knelt the crowd.

With his head in a golden halo the Apostle stood facing the city. At his feet there lay the Tiber, with, on its further bank, the Campus Martius, surmounted by the mausoleum of Augustus. A little below the latter edifice there could be seen the huge baths which Nero had built, with, lower still, the theatre of Pompey. Beyond them there stretched a huge expanse of other buildings which, with their many peristylia, columns, and towering façades, constituted an immense, swarming ant-heap of human

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beings. With its boundaries stretching away into the dark blue mist, this haunt of crime and also of power, this den of madness and also of method, represented both the capital and the despot of the universe, both the ruler and the lawmaker of the world. It lay there, a city at once omnipotent, invincible, and eternal.

Like a sovereign viewing his realm, Peter, surrounded by soldiers, stood contemplating Rome. At last he spoke.

"Thou art redeemed," he said, "and thou art mine!"

Yet even then none of the soldiers who were digging the hole in which the tree of suffering was to be planted, none of the faithful who were kneeling around the spot, realised that before them there was standing the true ruler of that city—that, though its Emperors and the hosts of the barbarians and the succeeding ages would pass away, the reign of that aged man in Rome would last until the end of time.

The sun, now huge and blood-red in colour, was sinking towards Ostia, and the whole of the western sky was brilliantly illuminated. As the soldiers approached Peter, to divest him of his garments, he suddenly raised himself erect, muttered a prayer, and lifted his right hand. The executioners, taken aback, halted where they stood, while the faithful held their breath. Amid a profound, an absolute, silence, Peter, with his right forefinger extended, made over the city and the whole world the sign of the cross, and blessed them in the hour of his martyrdom.

On that same wonderful evening another detachment of soldiers was conducting the Apostle Paul along the Via Ostiensis towards the spot known as "The Waters of Health." Behind him there followed a group of his converts; and whenever he recognised a familiar face he would stop and converse with its owner, since, as a Roman citizen, he had a right to exact a certain deference from the military escort. After passing through the Porta Tergemina he met a daughter of the Prefect Flavius Sabinus, and, perceiving her young face to be bathed in tears, he said to her: "Plautilla, daughter of eternal salvation, I pray you return home in peace. Yet give me your scarf, so that, at the moment when I go to the Lord, they may bind my eyes for me." Then he continued on his way with the joyous mien of a workman who has laboured all day, and is returning to his dwelling. His soul, in communion with Peter's, was as calm and peaceful as the evening sky. Thoughtfully he let his eyes roam over the plain which lay between him and the glowing Alban Hills. He remembered his travels, his labours, his hardships,

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the struggles in which he had been the victor, and the churches which he had built in every continent and beyond every sea. Yes, he had earned his rest, he had done his work, and the seed would never again be scattered by the wind of passion. Thus he was leaving the world in full consciousness that in the war which the world had declared it was truth, and truth alone, that would gain the day. And at the thought a great feeling of restfulness filled his being.

The road was long, and evening had begun to fall. The mountains had turned to purple, while around their bases the shadows were ever deepening. Flocks and herds were being driven to the fold, slaves had shouldered their implements to wend their way homewards, and children who were playing before the doors of houses which bordered on the road kept impeding the passage of the escort. Yet in that evening scene, in the golden transparency of that atmosphere that was so charged with quiet calm, Paul could perceive a marvellous harmony that seemed to be ascending from earth to the very heavens. And as he did so his heart swelled with joy to think that to the music of the universe there had been added, through his instrumentality, a new and virgin strain without which the world had hitherto been "as sounding brass, and as a tinkling cymbal."

Then he recalled how, throughout, he had preached love—how that always he had told men that, even though they should give the whole of their substance to feed the poor, and even though they should possess the ability to divine every mystery, they would be as nothing without love—without the love which was patient, gentle, and charitable, which was puffed not up with pride, which could not take offence, which bore all things, believed all things, hoped all things, suffered all things, and lasted for ever.

Yes, the span of his life had been spent in the teaching of love. And in his soul he said to himself: "Who can overcome love? What force can oppose it? How can it be quenched? Could Cæsar himself withstand it, even though he were to possess, in twofold number, legions and cities and seas and territories and peoples?"

Thus victorious, Paul was marching to receive his reward.

At length the procession left the high road, and turned towards the west by a narrow path which led to "The Waters of Health." Over the heathland the sun was sending forth a roseate glow. The centurion halted his men near the source of the spring. The fatal moment had arrived.

Laying upon his shoulder the scarf which Plautilla had given him for an eye-bandage, Paul calmly looked his last at the evening radiance, and then betook himself to prayer.

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His hour had sounded, and he saw before him a vast pathway of sunsets which was leading to Heaven itself. Deep within himself he repeated the words which, conscious of work accomplished and of his approaching end, he had written:

"I have fought the good fight, I have kept the faith, I have fulfilled my course; and now is there reserved for me the incorruptible crown of the just."

XXXI

ROME was always in a state of ferment, and the city which had conquered the universe had begun to cut its own throat, and to decay for want of rulers. Even before the hour had sounded for the two Apostles the conspiracy of Piso had broken out, and had been followed by such a merciless cutting off of exalted heads that persons who had hitherto seen in Nero a god of splendour now saw in him only a god of death. Mourning lorded it over the city, and fear possessed every hearth and every heart. Yet still the peristylia of lordly mansions were decked with flowers and wreathed with ivy, for it was forbidden to manifest any signs of grief. The world, on awaking each morning, used to ask itself whose turn would come that day; and ever the procession of phantoms which Cæsar trailed behind his chariot was growing larger.

Piso paid with his head for his conspiracy, and was followed by Seneca, Lucan, Fenius Rufus, Plautius Lateranus, Flavius Scævinius, Afranius Quinetianus, Tullius Senecio, Proculus, Araricus, Subrius Flavus, Sulpicius Asper, and many others. Some of these were the victims of their own vileness, some of their own riches, some of their own cowardice, and some of their own bravery. Alarmed at the number of conspirators, Cæsar hemmed the walls about with his legions, and put the city in a state of siege. Every day centurions escorted suspects to execution, and in servile fashion the condemned addressed fawning letters to Cæsar in which they thanked him for the sentence passed upon them, and left him a portion of their substance, in order that the remaining remnant might be saved for their children. It would almost seem as though Nero was purposely passing all bounds, in the hope of sounding the full vileness of mankind and its patience in enduring his bloodthirsty laws.

In the train of the conspirators there were exterminated also their relatives and friends; and the inhabitants of the splendid mansions erected after the fire could always feel

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sure that, on issuing from their dwellings, they would encounter an unbroken procession of funerals.

Pompey, Cornelius Martialis, Flavius Nepos, and Statius Domitius perished on the score of being insufficiently devoted to Cæsar. Novius Priscus met his end because he was the companion of Seneca. Rufus Crispus saw himself deprived of his rights to water and fuel for the reason that he had formerly been Poppæa's husband. The great Thrascas fell because of his virtue. Many others paid for their noble origin with their lives. Even Poppæa fell a victim to one of Cæsar's frenzies.

As for the Senate as a body, it cringed to the horrible sovereign, erected temples in his honour, made vows to the gods on behalf of his voice, crowned his statues with garlands, and awarded him priests of sacrifice, as though he actually were a god. Also, with terror in their souls the Senators repaired to the Palatine to raise the chant of the "Periodonices," and to join him in his sensual, drunken, flower-bestrewn orgies.

Slowly, however, there was ripening, and ever growing more necessary to be reckoned with, the seed which Peter had sown in the furrows watered with blood and tears.

XXXII

VINICIUS to PETRONIUS:

"Even here, dear friend, we learn from time to time what is passing in Rome; while, to add to our store of information, we have your letters. You ask me if we are safe? To that I would reply by saying that every one has forgotten us. Let that suffice.

"From the peristylum in which I am sitting and writing this letter to you I look out upon a peaceful bay where Ursus is casting his net into the clear waters. By my side my wife is winding a skein of red wool, while in the gardens, beneath the shade of the almond-trees, the singing of our slaves is audible. All is peace, my friend; we have wholly forgotten our former terrors and sufferings. Yet it is not the Parcæ¹ who are spinning the thread of our existence thus calmly, as you would have it, but Christ—the Christ, our Lord and Saviour, who sheds upon us His blessing.

"True, we still know grief and tears, for our doctrine commands us to weep for the misfortunes of others; but even in such tears there lies a consolation of which you non-Christians are unaware. One day, when the time allotted to us shall have come to an end, we shall meet

¹ The Fates.

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once more the dear beings who have perished, or are still destined to perish, for the divine doctrine.

"Thus in quietness of heart our days and months pass by. All our servants and attendants believe in Christ, and we love them, and they us, as Christ has commanded. Often, when the sun is setting, or when the waves are beginning to turn silver in the light of the moon, Lygia and I recall the bygone days which seem to us like a dream. And whenever I think how near that beloved head came to torture and death, my whole soul goes out in adoration of Our Lord; for He alone saved her, and restored her to me for ever.

"You too have known Paul of Tarsus, and formerly engaged in long conversations with him. Better than any one else, therefore, will you understand that, compared with his teaching, all the doctrines of your philosophers and your rhetoricians are but vain shadows and empty murmurs. Remember, then, his question: 'If Cæsar were a Christian, would you not feel more sure of your life, more certain of retaining what you possess, more free from fear, more assured of the morrow?' You used to tell me that Christian truth was the enemy of life. Well, to that I would reply that if, since the beginning of this letter, I had kept repeating but the three words, 'I am happy,' I should still have given you a poor idea of my happiness.

"Perhaps you will say that that happiness of mine is Lygia, and perhaps you will be right, for I love her immortal soul, and we love one another in Jesus. When youth and beauty shall have passed away, when our bodies shall have withered and death is knocking at the door, love will still survive, for our souls will be left to us. Before my eyes became opened to the light I was ready even to set fire to my house for Lygia's sake; yet now I know that even in those days I did not really love her. No, I did not really love her, for Christ had not taught me what love can be.

"Yes, Christ is the eternal source of happiness and peace of soul. Compare your pleasures coupled with anguish, your orgies uncertain of the morrow, your banquets like funeral feasts, with the life of us Christians. Yet, the better to make the comparison, come and visit us among our thyme-clad mountains, our shady groves of olive-trees, our ivy-covered banks. Awaiting you you will find two hearts which love you truly. You are a good and noble man who ought also to be happy. You have a mind able to discern the truth, and might end by loving it as we do; for though a man may be its enemy, as are Cæsar and Tigellinus, no man can remain indifferent to it. So, my dearest Petronius,

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Lygia and myself rejoice in the hope that soon we shall see you with us. May you continue to be fortunate and in good health, and may your arrival here be speedy! "

This letter Petronius received at Cumæ, whither he had accompanied Cæsar. Daily the latter was sinking further and further into his rôles of comedian, buffoon, and chariot-driver; daily he was plunging deeper and deeper into sickly, gross, abject debauchery; daily the elegant "Arbiter of Fashion" was becoming a mere thorn in his side. Whenever Petronius was silent Nero saw in his silence censure. Whenever Petronius expressed approval Nero thought he could distinguish amid his eulogies irony. In short, the splendid patrician at once irritated Cæsar's self-conceit and excited his envy.

Moreover, Petronius' wealth and magnificent works of art had aroused the covetousness both of his master and of that master's all-powerful minister. Hitherto they had borne with him because of the coming expedition to Achæa, where his taste and experience in Greek matters were likely to be useful; but Tigellinus had none the less done his best to prove to Cæsar that Carinas surpassed even Petronius in taste and ability, as well as—what was better—would be competent to organise games, receptions, and triumphal progresses in Greece. From the moment that Cæsar became convinced of this, Petronius was lost. Nevertheless, to award him his sentence of death in Rome would be dangerous, since Cæsar and Tigellinus remembered that the apparently effeminate man who turned night into day and seemed to care for nothing but pleasure, art, and his paramour had, as Proconsul in Bithynia and, later, as Consul in Rome, evinced an astounding aptitude for work, and a marvellous amount of energy. He was believed to be capable of anything, and known to be beloved even of the Prætorian Guards. Consequently none of Cæsar's intimates could predict with any certainty how, on a given occasion, Petronius would decide to act. Perhaps it would be wiser first to decoy him from the city, and then to attack him in the provinces?

So he was invited to visit Cumæ with the other Augustans; and though he suspected a snare, he accepted the invitation. Perhaps he wished to avoid the necessity of showing any open resistance; perhaps he wished once more to show Cæsar and his fellow Augustans a gay and careless face, and so to win a last victory over Tigellinus.

Scarcely, however, had he left Rome when Tigellinus accused him of having been an accomplice of the Senator Scævinius, who had acted as the mainspring of the late

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abortive conspiracy; whereupon the attendants whom Petronius had left behind him in Rome were thrown into prison, and a cordon was drawn around his metropolitan residence. In no wise disconcerted or intimidated by this, he said with a smile to his fellow Augustans as he received them in his splendid villa at Cumæ:

"Ahenobarbus does not like point-blank questions; so I should advise you to watch his face when I come to ask him whether it is he who has thrown my domestics into gaol."

Then he announced that, before setting out upon his travels again, he intended to offer his companions a banquet; and it was during the preparations for this festivity that he received Vinicius' letter.

For a moment or two that letter left him plunged in thought; but soon his face cleared, and he replied the same evening:

"I rejoice at your happiness, my friend, and admire your greatness of heart. I should never have imagined that two love-birds could have remembered any one else—let alone a distant friend. Yet not only have you not forgotten me—you even wish me to come to Sicily, that you may offer me a share both of your daily bread and of the Christ whom you declare to be so generously heaping you with His blessings!

"If it is so, by all means respect Him. Otherwise, I will not conceal from you the fact that, for my own part, I should have been inclined to think that Ursus had played a part in Lygia's rescue, and that the Roman people also had had a hand in it. However, since you are persuaded that it was due to Christ alone, I will not contradict you. Do not spare your offerings to your deity. Prometheus was sacrificed for the sake of humanity, even as, you say, was Christ; but Prometheus would appear to have been an invention of the poets, whereas people who are perfectly belief-worthy have assured me that Christ has materialised before their very eyes. At all events I agree with you that Christ is the most honourable deity extant. Yes, I well remember Paul's question to me, and feel convinced that, were Ahenobarbus to take to living according to the doctrine of Christ, I might find time to visit you in Sicily, where, by the seashore, and in the shade, it would be possible for us to engage in long conversations on the gods and the verities in general—conversations culled from the Greeks. To-day, however, my reply to you must be short.

"Only two philosophers do I admit. One of them is named Pyrrho, and the other one Anacreon. The re-

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mainder I hand over to you at a discount, and would join with them the whole school of Greek and Roman Stoics. Truth dwells in such inaccessible regions that even the gods cannot descry it from the summit of Olympus. Your Olympus, however, appears to be higher than theirs, and, standing on its topmost peak, you cry to me: 'Come up hither, and I will show you such things as you have never dreamt of!' Possibly you will; yet I would reply: 'My friend, I have no legs left.' And by the time that you have read this letter to the end, you will, I think, admit that I am right.

"No, O fortunate spouse of the dawn, your doctrine was not made for me. Should I, if I were to adopt it, be required to love my Bithynian porters and Egyptian cooks—to love Ahenobarbus and Tigellinus? By the white-limbed Graces, but I swear to you that, however much I might wish it, I could never go to *those* lengths. In Rome, also, there must exist at least a hundred thousand people who have crooked shoulder-blades, bow legs, withered calves, round eyes, and over-fat heads. Would you have me love *them* as well? Whence should I derive the necessary affection, seeing that I could have none in my heart? And if your deity wishes me to love all those persons, why has He not, in His omnipotence, gifted them with exteriors a little more comely, and created them in the image, say, of the Daughters of Niobe whom you have seen in the Palatine? He who loves beauty becomes, through the fact, incapable of loving ugliness. Such a man is not concerned to *believe in* the gods, but only to love them after the fashion of Phidias, Praxiteles, Scopas, Miro, and Lysias.

"In short, even if I desired to follow whither you seek to lead me, I have not the power. Nor have I the desire. Doubly, therefore, is the scheme out of the question. You believe that one day, on the other side of the Styx, in some dim Elysian pleasaunce, you will see your Christ. Very well. Let Him then tell you with His own mouth whether He could ever have accepted me, with my jewels, my Myrrhenian vase, my sumptuous books, and my beauty of the golden hair. The mere idea almost makes me laugh. Your own Paul of Tarsus explained to me that for Christ's sake it is necessary to renounce garlands of roses, banquets, and pleasure in general. True, he promised me another sort of happiness in exchange, but I told him that for that other sort of happiness I was too old—that my eyes still found delight in the spectacle of roses, and that the odour of violets would always please me better than does the stench of my unwholesome 'neighbour' of the Suburra.

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"So I have given you my reasons. Your happiness was never made to be my happiness. However, the supreme reason I have kept to the end of this letter. It is that Thanatos¹ is calling me. For you the dawn of life has just broken; for me the sun has set, and dusk is fast wrapping me about. In other words, dear friend, I must soon die.

"I need not labour the point. Things were bound to end thus. You know Ahenobarbus, and will the more readily understand what I mean. Tigellinus has got the better of me—or, rather, my victories over him are drawing to a close. I have lived as I would have wished to do, and I shall die in the manner that pleases me best.

"Do not take this too much to heart. No god has promised me immortality, and what is coming will not come unexpected. You are wrong when you say that only your god can teach a man to die resignedly. Our world knew, long before you learnt it, that, once the last cup has been emptied, it is time to depart, to return into the shadows. Also, our world has long known how to do so with an unmoved countenance. Plato says that virtue is music, and the life of a wise man harmony. If that be so, I have lived, and shall die, virtuous.

"Of your divine spouse I should like to take leave in the same words as, long ago, I addressed to her in the Auluses' house: 'During my life I have seen persons without number; but of women who equal yourself I have seen none.'

"So, to conclude, my friends—if, contrary to what Pyrrho professes, there remains any part of our soul after death, my soul shall, on its way to the shores of the ocean, lodge a while not far from your house, in the shape of a butterfly, or, if the Egyptians are to be believed, in that of a hawk.

"But for me to visit you in any other fashion is impossible.

"I pray that Sicily may become for you as the Garden of the Hesperides; that the goddesses of the fields, the woods, and the springs may ever strew your paths with flowers; and that in every acanthus growing over your peristylia there may come to nest a pure-white dove!"

XXXIII

PETRONIUS was not mistaken. Two days later the younger Nerva, who had always been devoted to him, sent him, by the mouth of a freedman, the latest news from Cæsar's Court.

¹ The Greek god of death.

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The downfall of Petronius had been decided upon. On the evening of the morrow a centurion was to transmit to him a command not to leave Cumæ, but to await there such further orders as might be dispatched to his address. A few days later—another messenger would bring him his sentence of death.

Petronius listened, impassive and calm as ever. Then he said:

"You are to convey to your master, for me, a precious vase which will be handed to you on your departure. Tell him that with all my soul I thank him, for he will have helped me to forestall the sentence."

And he burst out laughing like a man to whom a splendid idea has just occurred, and who is delighted at the prospect of putting it into execution.

The same evening his slaves ran hither and thither to invite such of the Augustans as were resident in Cumæ to a banquet at the sumptuous villa of "The Arbiter of Fashion." For his own part, he spent the previous afternoon in writing in his library. Then he took a bath, and had himself dressed by his robbers.

Splendid and noble, he passed thereafter into the triclinium, to inspect the preparations for the feast, and thence into the garden, where Greek women and maidens from the Isles were weaving garlands of roses for the fête. Not a shadow was there to be seen on his face. That the entertainment was going to be more magnificent even than usual was clear to his domestic staff from the fact that he had caused unusually large gratuities to be awarded to those of them with whom he was pleased, and only a light measure of stripes to those with whom he was dissatisfied. Also, he had ordered the lute-players and singers to be paid in advance, and on a very generous scale.

At length, seating himself under a beech-tree the sun-pierced foliage of which was studding the ground with golden lozenges of light, he sent for Eunice.

Presently she appeared—clad all in white, and with a sprig of myrtle in her hair—as beautiful a damsel as one of the Graces. He seated her by his side, and, touching her forehead lightly with his hand, looked at her a long while with eyes full of absorbed admiration.

"Eunice," he said, "for some time past you have not been a slave. Did you know that?"

She raised her calm blue eyes to his, and gently shook her head.

"I am *always* your slave, my lord," she added.

"But perhaps, also, you did not know that those slaves who are weaving garlands, and this villa, and all that

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it contains, and its lands, and its flocks, and everything else, belong to you from to-day?"

Sh started back from him, and cried in a voice that was tremulous with anxiety:

"Why do you tell me that? Why, oh why?"

Then she pressed herself to his side again, and looked at him—her eyelids blinking with terror as she did so. Yet still he smiled—always smiled.

For answer he spoke a single word.

"Yes," was what he said.

There fell a silence. A light breeze was gently stirring the leaves of the beech-tree. Petronius could almost have supposed that a marble statue was standing before him.

"Eunice," he added, "I believe in dying calmly."

She smiled a pitiful smile.

"I understand, my lord," was her reply.

That evening the guests arrived in shoals, for they knew that, compared with Petronius' banquets, the entertainments given by Nero were wearisome and barbaric. Nevertheless, whatever the ultimate symposium might be like, *one* idea at least had not occurred to the mind of any one present. That is to say, although it was known that the elegant "Arbiter" was lying under the cloud of the Imperial displeasure, such a circumstance had frequently occurred before, and always Petronius had succeeded in dissipating the cloud, either by a bold word or by a clever manœuvre. Consequently no one supposed that, this time, any serious danger was menacing him: and that opinion was the more confirmed by his cheerful, careless demeanour. His one wish was to die calmly; and, in the same way, Eunice, to whom his every word was as the word of an oracle, had on her features an expression of absolute calm, while her eyes were sparkling with what might very well have been taken for joy. At the door of the triclinium young girls, with their hair caught up under buckles, crowned with roses the foreheads of the guests as they arrived, and warned them, as the custom was, to cross the threshold right foot foremost.

The whole banquetting-hall smelt of violets, while a multi-coloured light was diffused from globes of Alexandrian glass. Near the couches on which the guests reclined stood maidens whose duty it was to sprinkle perfume upon the diners' feet; and against the walls were ranged lute-players and singers, awaiting the signal of their conductor. Everything breathed a quiet magnificence, and the air was charged with an unrestrained gaiety which mingled subtly with the scent of the flowers. The lights, the cups encrusted with

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jewels and precious cameos, the jars of wine in their beds of snow, the lofty table-pieces—all these things so delighted the guests that the buzz of conversation sounded like the humming of bees around an apple-tree in blossom. Here and there a joyous laugh would be heard, or an admiring murmur, or the too hearty caress of a hand upon a white shoulder.

Petronius talked unceasingly—the subjects of his conversation being the latest news, the latest divorces and intrigues, the chariot races, a gladiator who had lately won renown by his prowess, and the recently-published works of Atractus and the Sossii. Next, spilling a few drops of wine upon the floor, he announced that his libation was intended for the Queen of Cyprus,¹ the most ancient and the greatest of Roman deities, the only deity who was at once eternal, constant, and omnipotent.

Then he made a sign, and the lutes sighed out their melody, while fresh young voices accompanied them in unison, and dancing girls from Cos (Eunice's country) exhibited their roseate forms, clad in transparent muslin, before the eyes of the guests. Lastly, a diviner from Egypt took into his hands a crystal bowl full of clouded gold-fish, and made predictions for the guests' entertainment. When these items had come to an end Petronius raised himself upon his Syrian cushion, and said carelessly:

"My friends, pardon me if I address to you all a request before the banquet concludes. I wish each one of you to deign to accept the cup from which he has poured his libations to the gods and to my felicity."

With that he raised his Myrrhenian goblet—a priceless vessel which radiated the colours of the rainbow—and added to his guests:

"Here is the cup from which I myself have poured a libation to the Queen of Cyprus. Let no lips henceforth touch it, nor any hand use it in honour of another deity."

And the cup splintered to fragments against the saffron-strewn tiles of the floor.

Then, seeing the amazement in every eye, he continued:

"My friends, take your fill of enjoyment, for old age and infirmity are the sad companions of our later years. I am about to show you a good example, and to give you some good advice. You are about to see how, of one's own free-will, one may decline to await the coming of those sad companions."

"What do you mean?"

"I mean that my ideal in life is to enjoy myself, to drink wine, to listen to music, to contemplate the divine form

¹ Venus.

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which is reposing by my side, and to go to sleep crowned with roses. Already I have taken my leave of Cæsar. Hear what I have written to him by way of farewell."

He took from under his purple cushion a letter, and read:

" Divine Cæsar, I know that you are expecting me with impatience, and that, in the fidelity of your heart, you are pining for me day and night. Also, I know that you would gladly heap me with favours, and that you would like to make me Prefect of the Guards, and to appoint Tigellinus keeper of the mules on those of your estates which you inherited after the poisoning of Domitia,—an office for which he would seem specially to have been created by the gods.

" But, alas! I must excuse myself. By Hades in general, and by the shades of your mother, of your wife, of your brother, and of Seneca in particular, I swear that it is impossible for me to return to your side. Life is a treasure, my friend, and I flatter myself that I have known how to extract from that treasure the most precious of jewels. Yet in life there are things which I declare myself unable to bear any longer.

" Do not, I beseech you, suppose that I am disgusted at the fact that you have assassinated your mother, your wife, and your brother, or that I am indignant because you have burnt Rome, or that I am shocked at your consistent policy of hastening to the infernal regions every honest man in your Empire. No, dear grandson of Chronos; death is the common heritage of all sublunary beings—and, besides, no one would have expected to see you act otherwise.

" Yet for years and years longer to have my ears scarified with your singing, to have to see your Domitian-like legs—those vine-props of yours—fluttering about in the Pyrrhic dance, to have to hear you playing and ranting and reciting poems of your own manufacture, poor scribbler that you are!—well, such a prospect is more than I can endure. Consequently I feel within me an irresistible yearning to rejoin my forefathers. Let Rome stop her ears, and let the universe cover you with ridicule; but, for myself, I wish no longer to have to blush for you. I neither wish it nor could do it. Even the howling of Cerberus—like though it be to your singing—would afflict me less, since never have I been Cerberus' friend, and therefore never have I had to be ashamed of his voice.

" Fare you well, but in future leave singing alone. Kill, if you like, but do not make verses. Poison, if you like, but

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do not dance. Fire cities, if you like, but do not play the lute. These are the last wishes and most friendly counsel of
THE ARBITER OF FASHION."

The guests sat petrified, for they knew that the loss of the Empire itself would hurt Nero less than would this letter. Its author would assuredly be put to death, and pale terror seized them at the thought that they had heard it read.

But Petronius burst into gay, open laughter, as though he had suddenly been struck with some innocent pleasantry. Glancing around the circle of guests, he said:

"My friends, banish fear from your breasts. None of you need say that he has heard this letter. For myself, however, it will be permissible to take advantage of it when I come to meet Charon the Ferryman."

Thus speaking, he signed to his physician, and tendered him his arm. In a trice the dexterous Greek had encircled it with a gold armature, and opened the artery at the wrist. The blood spurted on to the cushion, and bespattered Eunice where she sat supporting Petronius' head. She bent over him, and said:

"My lord, did you think that I was going to leave you? Even though the gods had offered me immortality, and Cæsar his Empire, I still would have followed in your train."

Petronius smiled, raised himself a little, and touched her lips.

"Come with me," he said; then added: "You have loved me well and truly, dear one!"

She extended her rosy arm to the physician; and, a moment later, their blood had mingled—the blood of the one was fast being lost in the blood of the other.

Then Petronius made a sign to the musicians, and once more the lutes tinkled and the voices rang out as the "Harmodios" was sung. Next came the hymn in which the poet Anacreon bewails the fact that, after finding at his door the shivering, weeping child of Aphrodite,¹ and warming it, and drying its wings, he has been rewarded by the ungrateful boy piercing his heart with one of his arrows, and banishing peace from that heart for ever.

Mutually supporting one another, and divinely beautiful, the dying couple listened, pale and smiling.

At the conclusion of the hymn Petronius again offered his guests wine and dessert; after which he conversed with his neighbours on the many trifling, but charming, topics which were customary at such festivities. Finally he

¹ Cupid.

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summoned the physician to his side, and bid him tie up the artery, since he felt ready for sleep, and had a mind to abandon himself to the arms of Hypnos¹ before Thanatos should have come to lull him for ever to slumber. Then he fainted.

On recovering himself, he found Eunice's head reposing, like a flower, on his breast. For a moment he raised himself upon the cushion to gaze at her, and then had his veins opened once more.

The choristers were intoning a new hymn by Anacreon, and the lutes were tinkling with muted strings, to avoid drowning the words. Petronius was growing paler and paler. As the last harmony died away he turned to his guests, and said:

"My friends, you will agree that with us there perishes—"

He could say no more. With a supreme gesture his arm encircled Eunice, and his head fell backwards.

The guests, seated before those two white figures—figures resembling a pair of marvellous statues—felt that with them there had perished the last attribute of the Roman world, in the shape of its beauty and its poetry.

¹ The Greek god of sleep.

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EPILOGUE

At first the revolt of Vindex and the Gallic legions was not thought to be of much importance. Cæsar was only thirty years old, and the universe scarcely dared to hope that it would so soon be rid of the nightmare which was oppressing it. Also, it was not forgotten that both the preceding reigns had produced rebellions which had not, in their turn, produced a change of sovereign. Drusus had appeased the Pannonian legions, and Germanicus the Rhenish. Moreover, who was there to succeed Nero, seeing that all the descendants of the divine Augustus had perished during his term of rule? And, indeed, as the people contemplated the enormous statues which always represented him as Hercules they told themselves that nothing could ever break his power. There were those, even, who were anxious to see him return from Greece, since Helius and Polythetes, the two freedmen to whom, *ad interim*, he had entrusted the sovereignty, were governing the city in an even more sanguinary fashion than he himself had done. No man could feel sure of his life or of his goods. Law was dead, dignity and virtue were no more, and family ties no longer held good. So much was this the case that the crushed heart of the nation no longer dared to hope. Yet from Greece there came echoes of unheard-of triumphs accorded Cæsar, of thousands of garlands won by him, of thousands of competitions in which he had proved the victor. The universe seemed to have become one great orgy of blood and buffoonery, and the conviction was gaining ground that virtue and dignity had sunk into permanent abeyance, and that the reign of song and dance and debauchery and carnage was for ever established. Cæsar himself, to whom the revolt of Vindex seemed to promise an excuse for fresh brigandage, showed pleasure rather than anxiety when he heard the news of the outbreak.

So unwilling was he to leave Achæa that Helius found himself obliged to inform him that, should he linger much longer among the Greeks, the Empire would end by being

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lost to him. Only then did he set sail for Neapolis. Yet, even when arrived thither, he only resumed his playing and singing, without giving so much as a thought to the growing peril. In vain did Tigellinus represent to him that, contrary to precedent, the present revolt had a leader at its head, and that that leader was a descendant of the kings of Aquitania, and a famous and experienced warrior. "The Greeks listen to me here," was Nero's reply. "They are the only people who know how to listen and to show themselves worthy of my singing." As soon, however, as he heard that Vindex had declared him to be beneath contempt as an artist he made a precipitate departure for Rome. The wounds inflicted upon him by Petronius, though partially salved in Achæa, had broken out afresh, and he could not rest until he had called upon the Conscrip't Fathers to avenge such an unheard-of insult to his person.

On the way he caught sight of a bronze group representing a Gallic warrior who was being brought to the ground by a Roman knight: and the circumstance seemed to him an excellent omen. Indeed, from that day onwards he never referred to Vindex and his revolt but with ridicule. The Imperial entry into Rome surpassed anything that had ever been seen there. Among other things, Cæsar used the same chariot as had figured in the triumph of Augustus; and, to allow the procession to pass, a whole arch of the amphitheatre had to be pulled down. The Senate, the knights, and an immense populace went out to meet him, and the shouts of "Hail, Augustus! Hail, Hercules! Hail, Olympian and immortal deity!" made the very walls tremble. Behind him were borne the garlands which he had won, banners inscribed with the names of the cities where he had triumphed, and shields with lists of the great artists whom he had beaten. The idea that a mortal being could ever lift a hand against such a demigod as himself seemed to him absurd and senseless; for he really believed himself to be an Olympian, and therefore immune from death. The obsession was, if anything, increased by the shouts and transports of the mob; and on that day of triumph one might have thought that not only Nero and Rome, but also the universe at large, had gone stark, staring mad.

None the less, that evening saw the columns and walls of the temples covered with scrawls which stigmatised Cæsar's crimes, threatened him with imminent vengeance, and rallied him on his qualities as an artist. Also, a sort of catch-phrase had been invented which ran: "Cæsar has sung, Cæsar has sung; and to-day he has awakened the Gallic cock!" Alarming rumours began to spread from lip

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to lip, and to assume monstrous proportions. Anxiety seized even upon the Augustans, and, in view of the uncertain state of the future, they dared not express a hope of better things, nor voice a single thought or a single sentiment.

Still did Nero continue to live for the theatre and for music, to interest himself in newly-invented instruments, and to superintend the installation of a novel hydraulic organ in the Palatine. So absurd and incapable of plan or of reason was his cast of mind that he still believed that the danger could be averted by his announcing a fresh series of circus representations and spectacles. Clearly his interest in the struggle was limited to finding fitting words to describe the situation; and this indifference of his caused his intimates to begin to lose their heads. More than one of them believed his quotations to be intended merely to amuse himself and his Court, so feverish was his conduct become, and so contradictory were the countless schemes which flitted through his brain. Sometimes he would decide to flee the advancing peril, and give orders for his lutes and zithers to be packed up, regiments of amazons to be recruited from among his younger slaves, and the legions of the Orient to be transferred to Rome again. Next he would imagine that he could allay the revolt of the Gauls, not by armies, but by his singing. Yes, his legionaries should surround him and, with eyes full of tears, intone an epinicion¹ which should usher in the golden age both for himself and for Rome! Again, he would sigh for more blood, and then declare that, failing all else, he would be content with the tetrarchate of Egypt. Again, he would cite soothsayers who had predicted for him the Empire of Jerusalem, yet, almost in the same breath, burst into tears at a mental picture of himself wandering through the world as a vagrant singer forced to earn his daily bread! Yet in the latter case the cities and the nations of the world would at least honour him, not as the sovereign of the globe, but as a rhapsodist without rival!

Thus did he storm, and rave, and sing, and play, and go from one plan or one quotation to another—always transforming both his own existence and that of the world about him into a nightmare at once bizarre, fantastic, and frightful—into a loud, foul jest that was made up of bombastic speeches, bad verses, groans, tears, and blood. Yet ever in the West the cloud was growing, and becoming denser and more dark. For the measure was full—the farce was drawing to its close.

As soon as Cæsar learnt that Galba also had risen, and

¹ Song of victory.

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that Hispania had joined him, he flew into yet another fit of insensate rage. Breaking the cups on his dining-table, he overthrew the latter, and gave orders which neither Helius nor Tigellinus themselves had the hardihood to put into execution. To cut the throats of all Gauls resident in Rome, to fire the city again, to let loose the wild beasts from the vivaria, to remove the seat of government to Alexandria—all these seemed to him schemes at once splendid, arresting, and easy of performance. Yet the days of his omnipotence were past, and even the accomplices of his crimes were now holding themselves in readiness for a fall.

Presently the death of Vindex and the rise of dissensions among the rebel armies seemed to promise a restoration of the balance in Cæsar's favour, and at once new festivals, triumphs, and sentences of death were announced; but one night there arrived from the camp of the Prætorians a mounted messenger white with foam—a courier who had come to announce that here, in the very city itself, the soldiers had raised the standard of revolt, and had proclaimed Galba Emperor!

Cæsar was asleep at the time, but, on suddenly awaking, he called for his men-at-arms to approach the door of his room. Yet no; the palace was empty. Only a few slaves in distant corners were purloining anything upon which they could lay their hands. Then before his very eyes they took to flight, and he found himself wandering through the palace, and filling the night stillness with cries of terror and despair.

At length three of his freedmen—Phao, Spirus, and Epaphrodite—came to his rescue. Yet, for all their efforts to induce him to flee (for the reason that not a moment was to be lost), he still continued to delude himself with vain hopes. Suppose, clad in mourning, he were to go and harangue the Senate? Would the Conscript Fathers be able to resist his eloquence and his tears? What if he were to use all his art, all his persuasiveness, all his skill as an actor? Surely he would overcome them? Surely he would win at their hands at least the exarchate of Egypt?

Trained to flatter him, the freedmen could not return to this a direct denial; but they foresaw that long before he could reach the Forum he would be torn in pieces by the crowd. Consequently they threatened to leave him to his own devices unless at once he mounted on horseback. Phao also offered him the asylum of his own villa, which lay beyond the Porta Nomentana.

With their heads shrouded in cloaks, they galloped for the boundaries of Rome. The night was growing pale,

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but the unwonted stir in the streets attested the excitement of the hour. Soldiers, singly or in bands, were spreading themselves over the city, while, near their camp, Nero's horse shied violently at the sight of a corpse, and, Cæsar's cloak slipping from his head, a passing soldier recognised the face of the late Emperor. Nevertheless the encounter so startled the man that he drew himself up, and gave the military salute. As the party passed the camp they could hear the thunder of voices acclaiming Galba; and for the first time Nero realised that his hour was come. Seized with fear and remorse, he fancied that he could see before him a dark cloud whence the faces of his mother, of his wife, and of his brother were peering at him. His teeth began to chatter, yet still his comedian's soul found a certain charm in the horror of the situation. To be the omnipotent master of the world, yet to have lost everything, appeared to him the acme of tragedy; and, faithful to himself, he played the premier rôle to the end. A fever for quotation seized upon him, as well as a wild hope that his companions would remember his words, and be able to hand them down to posterity. Every now and then, also, he would call aloud for Spiculus, the cleverest gladiator of the day in the art of killing. Next he would exclaim, "My mother, my wife, and my brother are calling me!" and all the while let faint rays of foolish, futile hope keep breaking across his mind. He knew that death lay ahead of him, but he would not believe it.

They found the Porta Nomentana open. Further on they passed Ostrianum, where the Apostle had preached and baptised. By dawn they had reached Phao's villa.

Once there, the freedmen no longer concealed from their master the fact that it was time for him to die. Accordingly he had the grave dug, and stretched himself out upon the ground in order that they might take his exact measure. Yet the sight of the earthen clods appalled him, and his buffoon's face turned white, and huge drops of sweat welled forth upon his forehead. Still he dallied. In trembling accents which he strove to render tragic he declared that his hour was not due. Lastly, he began a fresh stream of quotations, and ended by demanding that his body should be burnt.

"What an artist is perishing!" he kept repeating in dazed fashion.

Suddenly a courier arrived with the news that the Senate had decreed that the parricide should be punished according to established custom.

"What is that custom?" asked Nero with ashen lips.

"To fix the victim's neck in a fork, to flog him to death,

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and to cast his body into the Tiber," answered Epaphrodite rudely.

Nero opened his mantle.

"It is time," he said, with his eyes turned to the sky.

Then once more he exclaimed:

"What an artist is perishing!"

At this moment the sound of other horses galloping was heard, and there entered a centurion and some soldiers—come for the head of Ahenobarbus.

"Now!" cried the freedmen.

Nero applied the dagger to his throat, but he thrust with a timid hand, and it was clear that he would never dare to insert the blade in earnest. All at once Epaphrodite brought his hand down upon that of the Emperor, and the dagger entered to the hilt, while the dying man's eyes rolled upwards—huge, horrible, and charged with terror.

"I have come to announce that you have been reprieved!" exclaimed the centurion.

"Too late, too late!" came, in a rattling gasp, the reply.

"Ah, what fidelity!"

The next moment death had thrown its shadow over Nero's face. From the great thick neck the blood was spurting in a black torrent over the flowers of the garden. For a moment his heels drummed upon the soil. Then he died.

On the morrow the faithful Acte covered the remains with precious stuffs, and cremated it on a perfumed brazier. . . .

Thus passed Nero as pass storm, fire, war, and pestilence. Henceforth there was to reign over Rome, from the heights of the Vatican, the great basilica of St. Peter.

Not far from the ancient Porta Capena there stands to this day a little chapel whereon is inscribed, in half-effaced characters: QUO VADIS, DOMINE?

